

**The construction of a transnational identity: the notion of  
space, place and belonging, as a response to Australia  
(Melbourne)**

**An exegesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Fine Art**

**Mohamed Abumeis**

**M A**

**School of Art**

**College of Design and Social Context**

**RMIT University**

**August 2013**

## **Declaration**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by third party is acknowledgement; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks must go to my homeland's people, and my parents, who gave me the opportunity to travel the world and experience new cultures. Many people's friendship and encouragement has sustained me throughout this project. I am grateful for the support of family, friends, and mentors who have not only cheered me on throughout academic career but also helped me with this project in particular ways such as providing helpful feedback.

I extend my appreciation to all who have participated with me on this adventure. Any wrong turns or any mistaken steps that appear in this exegesis reflect my progress along the path and are in no way a reflection of their institutional guidance and support. I must, however, give special thanks to three gentlemen with whom I have shared the ideas of this exegesis: Dr Les Morgan, whose constructive feedback greatly improved my writing, Dr Peter Hill, whose institutional supervision was a refreshing source of encouragement, and Professor David Forrest, who made invaluable suggestions to this exegesis. Thank you.

I hope this work will make a productive contribution to the ongoing debates about cultural diversity, hybridity, Multiculturalism, and transnational art practice, Cross-cultural dialogue and international mobility.

## **Abstract**

### **The construction of transnational identity: the notion of space, place, and belonging, as a response to Australia (Melbourne)**

#### **Background:**

This journey crosses borders. It takes place at that point where art practice meets research. This exegesis and the practice-led research (paintings and drawings) investigate the characteristics of a transnational art practice. Throughout this exegesis the term “exegesis” refers to the combination of the practice-lead studio research and the text-based exegesis. The exegesis examines significant aspects of hybridity aesthetics and ‘transnationalism’. It focuses on two places and two cultures – Libya, my old home, and Australia my new one. An expanded notion of Western ideas, especially artworks, has also grown from my time spent living in the UK and the USA.

I evaluate my own experiences as a 'transnational' displaced painter, including the fragmentation and synthesis of ideas, belief systems, and symbols. The project uses narrative, colour, and texture to explore two very different cultures through my paintings and the work of those artists who have influenced me. Melbourne is a great cultural capital. It has given me many themes and sub-themes to engage with, not least a “cultural expressionism” based on multiculturalism.

This practice-led research project turns on my own art, practice, concept, materials and techniques as a transnational artist working in Australia. It explores the development of my artwork in relation to my multi – layered identity. It investigates how my Libyan origins, roots, and identity have been transformed through motifs in my creative work. My temporary migration to Australia has resulted in strong attachments to my new home city of Melbourne. This has impacted powerfully on my personal identity. To summarise, this project engages with notions of place and space, with my own belonging in the context of the relevant literature, and with contemporary art practice.

**The key research themes:**

The chapters of this exegesis share certain features with the ongoing debates on cross-cultural issues such as key areas of theory, the dilemma of identity, including: nationalism, hybridity, shifting meanings of 'home', narrative and notions of place, space and a sense of 'belonging'. Multiculturalism and transnationalism are conceptualized in the context of migration while art as research deals with creativity and integrity.

**Main objectives:**

- To approach closely the perception of space, place and the reconstruction of identity within a transnational framework, and to address issues regarding the conceptualization and the transformation of home and belonging, from a migrant perspective and as a displaced artist.
- To create a new series of artworks as a transnational artist in Australia in order to address issues regarding my identity and its attendant beliefs as well as my response to Melbourne as a new home - within the context of it also being an alien culture.
- To produce a supporting exegesis documenting this research project which will take place in the School of Art at RMIT University, Melbourne, and include the resources of the Fine Art painting area. It is hoped the project will be a significant contribution to the newly emerging conversation of contemporary artists and the exploration of this in modern Australian society.

**Aims:**

- To find a new path by using an appropriate method in order to create my own personal visual language and individual contribution to enable me to produce a distinctive artistic dialogue that can fit within both Australian and world art practice.
- To produce a body of original painting that utilizes and revitalizes the historical and traditional aspects of cultural expression to create a correlation between personal identity and Australian influences, reinforcing the idea of being a transnational artist in Melbourne.

The overall aims of the research (text and images), together with the creative work (paintings), form a piece of research aimed at defining, illustrating and exemplifying the main parameters of transnational contemporary art practice. Beyond the project's aims and objectives, there is an attempt see how close the boundaries can be possibly met. Ultimately, there are multiple entry points into the new meanings achieved through new visual and transformative, metaphors and conceptual frameworks, in order to work predominantly with text, while playing conceptually with cultural boundaries.

### **Research questions:**

**1-** Can we ever leave home? If we can do so, can we escape from the past? If so, what kind of concern should we give to notions of 'elsewhere'? And can we develop new achievement elsewhere?<sup>1</sup> (Al – Ali & Koser, 2002) In doing so, in what ways can I use my identity construction themes as African, Arabic, and Muslim to incorporate powerful integration between 'over here' - Australia as my temporary migration place - and "over there" my homeland Libya<sup>2</sup>, in the context of contemporary art?

**2-** In what way can I establish my own individual perspective, metaphorical and conceptual framework? In order to approach the perception of space and place and reconstruction of identity within a transnational framework, and to address issues regarding conceptualizing and transforming of home and belonging from a migrant perspective and through working as a diasporic artist?

**3-** In what ways can I use appropriate visual language in order to create my own personal visual language and individual contribution to the field?

### **Choice of research (Rationale):**

This personal, artistic journey has been on-going for more than twenty years. During that time there has not been a great deal written about the work of Libyan artists, especially concerning traditional modes of expression, issues of appropriate cultural practice, and authenticity. Hardly anything has been written in English, and it is my

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<sup>1</sup> Al – Ali, Nadjie., Koser, Khalid. (2002, p. 14). *New Approaches to Migration?*. Routledge: London & New York.

<sup>2</sup> Libya is my homeland – the country which located on North Africa-on the Mediterranean Sea.

hope that this exegesis will be a positive contribution to the field. It is well known that Australia is a vibrant, cosmopolitan, and multicultural country. However, very little documentation and investigation has been undertaken on the subject of Libyan contemporary art and artists. I am one of the few the Libyan artists to come to Australia to study Fine Art (painting). Consequently, I am delighted to have been able to take this opportunity to be part of Australian artistic society, searching for artistic responses to the country, the city, and the university which welcomed me so warmly.

Through this research-based project I will produce original conceptual and experimental artworks based on a series of large – scale paintings, including a supporting exegesis documenting my visual experiments and the doctoral journey. Collectively, this work (from the migrant perspective), symbolizes my state of mind and being as a guest (foreigner), working with an appreciative host. The interesting focus on the city sub – themes response to Melbourne is both my need in seeing and depicting, and my constant effort to define how the place, the city, is. However, this work does not pretend to be comprehensive, although it has been possible to represent artistic trends and developments more fully, of necessity, in order to concentrate on art and artists as yet unknown in Australia.

### **How should the research be evaluated?**

Over the last several decades a number of scholarly articles and books have been published on migrant artists' art forms in Australia. Yet these studies have included little art practice with Libyan origins that reflect diasporic sensibility, specifically in the form of painting. As a result of this emphasis, only a partial view of Libyan visual art and culture that has been presented beyond its border here in Australia (Melbourne) continues to reinforce this research in the context of contemporary art, as long as the city opens its gate for the quality of cultural expression based on multiculturalism.

Drawing upon theoretical insights from a range of disciplines, including transforming cross – cultural issues through art, this research addresses the construction of identity and its transnational movement, historical and environmental contexts, and cultural, social and political implications of moving from place to place from over there, Libya to over here Australia. My art practice has emphasized my difference to others,



or as has been said, ‘without *difference* there is no meaning’<sup>3</sup> (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske, 1994). This same practice visualized my own voice and personal narratives. It specifically revealed my reflexive thoughts on the challenge that I faced within the research process, and my response to transnational places (Melbourne).

### **The development of the research project (Thesis structure):**

My focus on ‘The construction of transnational identity: place, space and belonging, as a response to Melbourne’ addresses complex methodological concerns: How can I bring together (in paint and text) fragmented cultural and personal aspects of my life in two places? And in what way can I integrate the cross – intercultural spaces in between ‘over there’ my homeland (Libya) and ‘over here’ my temporary migration place Australia, into the field of art? One attempt at an individual framework is the integration and approach to “Transnationalism”. This approach has the benefit of reconstructing nationalism and regenerating the perception of belonging. Another possible method is through addressing the relationship between the power of identity and the impact of Australian influence in particular circumstances of cultural contact, exchange, and conflict. It has become evident that neither of these approaches offers, in itself, an analytical or comparative method within this trans-cultural case study. New knowledge will grow out of a synthesis.

The following thematic issues provide the framework for the construction of a transnational identity analysis in this thesis: the dilemma of national identity, transforming home, notions of place, space and belonging, and interpretation through art. Through the thesis chapters I will discuss each of these themes, and link them to the practical aspects of the studio art practice. These integrations result from the research plan; they function for the DFA program requirements, and as a case study essential for developing particular ‘individual’ attitudes, approaches, concepts and frameworks.

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<sup>3</sup> O’Sullivan, Tim., Hartley, John., Saunders, Danny., Montgomery, Martin., Fiske, John. (1994, p. xii). *Key Conception in Communication and Cultural Studies: Second edition*. Routledge: London & New York.

Each chapter of this exegesis comes from the titles of solo exhibitions that I held in Australia during my candidature. Each follows a different theme, and it is envisaged that the studio research will be exhibited according to those themes and their progression.

The result of the research is presented in this thesis, which represents chronologically the various phases of the work contained in five chapters. The chapter - centred exegesis will relate to each other, as well as to the more over-arching themes. The project, then, has two main aims, both closely connected. The first is to introduce the reader to the results of contemporary research into the 'dilemma' of a national identity and the construction of a transnational identity together with theories that seek to explain it. The second, in a more personal way, relates to my everyday experience of art and transformation relating to a sense of place.

#### **Chapter - Project (1): 'Introduction: 'Nationalism' the dilemma of identity'**

Project one explores the complex construction of my national identity and its relationship to art practice, beginning with the analytic and evaluative use of the concept 'nationalism'. This approach acknowledges that these three themes<sup>4</sup> are dominant in the construction of national identity. Therefore this process of forming and performing of nationalism as Kevin Dunn points out (cited by Noble 2009) "brings a fundamental power at the level of the individual"<sup>5</sup>, in particular for my art practice. The experience of identity themes is employed to test the validity of the experiences of the 'other'. The point is each of these themes permits me to qualify and unify the other throughout the complex question of identity. This transformative process points out the evaluative dimensions of cultural construction that narrows 'Nationalism's boundaries'.

#### **Chapter - Project (2): 'In between 'over here' Australia and 'over there' Libya'**

This project evokes the construction of my living across boundaries, and establishes transnational practices which permit me to deal with my membership of two cultures. It seeks to address the product of individual responses, which generate heated debate

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<sup>4</sup> African – Arabic – and Islamic

<sup>5</sup> Noble, G. (2009. p.78). Lines in the sand. The Cronulla Riots, Multiculturalism and Natural Belonging, Series 28. The Institute of Criminology. Sydney.

about my own experience of shifting meanings of home by exploring the effects of the rupture of leaving my 'home'. In particular, my concern is to analyse the effect of the dynamics of variables and surroundings that play their roles in the reformation of my identity.

### **Chapter - Project (3): 'Narrative in Colour and Texture'**

Through this chapter/project, integrating studio practices and methodologies has emerged as the key components of the discourses and fundamental concerns relating to the current fragmentation and forging of boundaries. The adoption of colour and technique of textural quality and its efficient potential to serve the concept of paintings as a lyrical metaphor for cultural, political and social issues (identity - history – migration – boundaries), and for the city sub- themes of multiculturalism & cosmopolitanism, and from the migrant perspective to symbolise my state of mind being a guest, as well as a foreigner, becoming appreciative of his host.

### **Chapter - Project (4): 'Sense of a Place and Space: Place Embrace'**

This project will attempt to establish the need for understanding the role of a sense of place in the cross-cultural analysis, and its transformation through art. It addresses the central issue of how to theorize the question of the city's roles on the emergence of multiculturalism. The project brings my voice through my journey in Australia as metaphorical of cultural observation related to "locality"<sup>6</sup>. The individual enthusiastic response to what was evidently an influential and formative resource response to Melbourne provoked intense observation and considered analysis of what can be identified with the term 'transnationalism' - located within historical, cultural and geographical contexts. Throughout this project I will evoke the synthesis of two cultures, both related to the local and the personal.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis I have framed issues involving how I might re-work concepts and theories through further interrogation of practical artworks. In doing so, I have engaged with several terms, which have been taken literally from established disciplines, such as theory, psychology, sociology, literature and art. Significantly, I

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<sup>6</sup> From migrant and local perspective.

refer to my own experience and its attempts to make connections beyond Nationalism. This thesis will explore cross - issues in art, concerned with terms such as hybridity, fluidity, transnationalism and belonging in order to adopt the structuring values of the emergence of transnational art practice.

The outcomes point to the shifting meaning of home and how it has revealed itself to be a most substantial characteristic of being transnational. The dynamic consequences of this transforming process generated new approaches to transformation of home to develop dynamic approaches to migration and the construction of a transnational identity. The unexpected and contingent results of reconstruction identity, which is as institutional term that seems to be located in a certain mobility – dynamism – migration – integration – cosmopolitanism – juxtaposition, and the related consequences of hybridity.

As the title of the project emerges, the conceptual dimension of integrating studio art practice ‘colour, content, and texture’ as a language constitutes the framing metaphor for my intense consideration of the research questions regarding the notion of space and places, identity and cultural significance which I readdress as sense of ‘belonging’<sup>7</sup>. This body of work, and its underlying narratives, tells a story. It is the story of my journey into Australian culture. It is a story whose visual language is about colour, content, and texture.

Implicitly or explicitly, exploration is a kind of process which is more usually associated with words and text. I use paint and images. I try to harness the conceptual uses of colour, content, and texture as a metaphor for my new palette. From this, a per-formative reading is produced. And from this perspective, and for me as an artist who seeks to reconstruct his identity, it is a kind of satisfaction and a relief to practice a form of art that allows my life to be more fluid and mobile, and which does not restrict me as a painter.

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<sup>7</sup> Belonging: as conceptual framework.

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# Chapter One



# **Chapter One**

## **Project One**

### **‘Introduction: ‘Nationalism’ the dilemma of identity’**

#### **Introduction**

This introductory chapter introduces the institutional structure of my national identity; it investigates its construction and its transnational movement together with theories that seek to explain it. It is concerned with the complex construction of national identity in relation to my multi-layered identity as African, Arabic, and Muslim, and its relationship to art practice. Beginning with the analytic and evaluative use of the concept ‘nationalism’ the power of relationship between the identity themes holds the values which affect practice in art, and guide aesthetic judgment.

#### **Identity construction themes: homeland as routes and roots**

The organizing idea about focusing on the dilemma of national identity is to define boundaries as a point of start of this journey. This will serve as background for gaining an introductory knowledge which has frequently developed across expanded boundaries of present place, space and time. In doing so, through this chapter it was essential to foreground the ways in which "nationalism" is constituted and contested through complex themes of power, in a way when used as a term which invokes the dilemma of national identity. But not to mention the specific historical events in which these themes have been recognized to avoided conflicting meaning at inessential objectives. This interdisciplinary approach as a structural necessity concerned with the questions of research in particular in terms of the 'dilemma' of national/transnational identity. In this sense, one of the structural features is concerned with the point of origin.

There is a preoccupation of explaining how I could describe myself in a way that has been compounded at different places, times and in different contexts. The way in which I would individually express my identity in relation to answering the question of the dilemma of my national identity with the notion of

‘postmodern flexibility’<sup>8</sup> (Brah, A; Coombes, A. 2000) in which permitted me to draw on three related themes that represented the complex construction of my identity. For example, my paintings entitled *Identity construction themes; African – Arabic - and Muslim* (1 and 2) (2009) explore the power relation through a complex and sensitive meditation on my own nationality; how I experience myself and my art through cultural, social and political structures.



Figure (1): Abumeis; ‘Identity construction themes; African - Arabic - and Muslim’1’ (2009)

The transformation within these paintings is a long way from being understood as a visual ideology across racial identification in which its features are thought to provide the crucial criteria of each theme or category as an ideological attribute. The narrative in colour shapes the unity of which individuals are unified for inclusion in the national community, and are classified as subject or citizens within it. The project has no objective to examine the social construction of this blended theme as problematic.

Beyond that, it classified the demographic historical background that has provided the contingency and possibility for the emergence of mixed/unified collective- identity and subjectivity of conditional belonging. Phoenix and Owen pointed out "the emphasis in postmodern approach on fluid, shifting and

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<sup>8</sup> Brah, A. Coombes, A. (2000 p. 90). *Hybridity and its discontents politics, science, culture*. Routledge. London and New York.

multiple identities is also potentially helpful in the conceptualization of mixed-parentage identities".<sup>9</sup> According to Brah and Coombes (2000, p. 90)



Figure (2): Abumeis; 'Identity construction themes' (2009)

Fundamental considerations are needed within Libyan societies to re-evaluate racial and ethnic identities within a conceptual framework which facilitates the recognition of the dynamism of national identity. This approach acknowledges that these three themes are dominant in the construction of my national identity<sup>10</sup>. According to Noble, G. (2009, p. 78) as Kevin Dunn points out "this brings a fundamental power at the level of the individual", and is particularly so for my art practice. This division has played influential roles in analyzing and approaching the questions and dilemmas of national identity and belonging, and enhancing the sources of my life and art practice.

### **The dilemma of national identity 'Nationalism'**

The analysis of ethnic (integrated racial background) refers to the construction of my national identity themes. It helps my understanding of the interaction of these three themes or aspects of identification. The point is that each of these

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<sup>9</sup> Phoenix and Owen explored that in the context of postmodernism (1950s – 1980s).

<sup>10</sup> African – Arabic – and Islamic

African that related to the location - Arabic related to the roots of society - Islamic related to the religion of society (99% Muslim). I would note here that, to be Muslim does not mean you must be Arabic; you could be Australian Muslim or whoever.

themes permits me to qualify and unify the other throughout the complex questions of identity. This transformative process points out the evaluative dimensions of construction that narrow Nationalism's boundaries (though I might struggle over definitions of nationalism). Whether this represents a significant challenge to a contemporary framework of national identity projected through a particular approach is, however, debatable. I refer here to the meaning of Leuthold (2011) use of the term 'Nationalism' is that "Nationalism presents a paradox in the context of cross-cultural relations".<sup>11</sup>



Figure (3): Abumeis; 'The Blue Man' (2004)

The dilemma of national identity ("Nationalism") paradoxically helps to construct the origins of one's mind and condition. Therefore, several human conditions, for example, dislocation, alienation and exclusion can often occur through living in sometimes alienating transnational communities and modern societies. In this sense, nationalism is unreflective, limited and problematic. In

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<sup>11</sup> Leuthold, S. (2011, p. 64). Cross – Cultural Issues in Art: Frames for Understanding. Routledge. New York and London.

this context, a national identity is basic in origin: of cultural, social and political relations and of due nature “‘nationalism’ is an ideal example of “otherness”<sup>12</sup>.

The theorist Leuthold (2011) puts forward two theories of 'otherness'. The first aspect is that the experience of the other inherently depends on specific historical conditions of the relationship between cultures and conditions which are inherent in ethnic, religious, political, or economic conflict and contest. Consequently, Leuthold found this theory has a highly negative impact on practice within transnational communities. The second theory is a contrasting aspect, which views the other as a global, inherent or natural knowledge structure. In this view, many artists, including myself, have always sought to differentiate a way to approach and explore new possibilities, and as a way to understand themselves.



Figure (4): Abumeis; 'For brighter day to come' (2008)



Figure (5) Abumeis; 'Thinking in loudly voice'

In some cases Nationalism and the art practice that it generates is a truthful expression of identification purpose, loyalty of ancestors, and a wish for independence and for liberation from persecution. It reflects substantial changes in the political, economic, social and subsequently the cultural lives, as Leuthold claims that 'Nationalism implies social change, and art is often asked to play a positive role in this social change.' (2011, p. 4) It would seem then, that the

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<sup>12</sup> Assfore, J. (1994, p. 16 - 20)

experience of dealing with the 'nationalism' will serve as legitimate basis of art making. However, there are profound concerns that some art practices transform the influence of nationalism as an institutional ground and experiential basis of art. From a transnational concept, the primary concern of practicing in art is that what major objective in art transcends national borders, and that the experience of 'nationalism', therefore, evokes unnecessary fabricated limitations of artistic innovation. This has been supported by Leuthold's theoretical statement,

"such border crossing stands as evidence of the cosmopolitan nature of art and this even becomes the basis of a value claim as in "the best art is that which transcends boundaries of time and space most completely." (2011, p.67)

Thus my practice shifted from the depiction of 'the tendency' engaged in the notion of 'Nationalism' and its bounds and restrictions that marked the characteristic of my earlier paintings. For such a period that extended to three decades of a practicing in art, in particular, since the start of this century - beginning with my journey with exile, I became aware of the problem inherent in the use of term "Nationalism" can be a complex problem in a theoretical framework. It could destroy an identification that we have difficulty with. It can also cause identity consumption and exaggeration and accrue a negative impact on sources of knowledge and feeling, in relation to perception of belonging. Above all, it can possibly cause a lack of communication and interaction with 'otherness' that may lead to segregation or being on peripheries.

From a contemporary perspective, this part of this project explores nationalism as a complex issue. It builds to the conclusion that, practicing in art in relation to nationalism can lead to identity consumption and reflect limited judgment which in consequence approaches making an ideological appreciation possible. However, there is no doubt that many of us may have a sense of belonging to a particular national identity, and even some feel that they belong to a particular group, as has been shown by various minorities over the world.



Figure (6): Abumeis; 'Icons Juxtaposition' (2004)

In so doing, it is thought that there seems to be there is a constant possibility of correspondence between art and nationalism. Consequently, the dilemma of identity and its context has offered this chapter is a historical analysis that leads to investigating the notion of understanding art in relation to 'Nationalism'.

### **Understanding Art in Relation to 'Nationalism'**

The concern of approaching the controversy between negative and positive manifestations of the relationship between art and nation 'nationalism' are explored briefly in this part of chapter one. It has been claimed by theorists that there is a potential for cross-cultural understanding and appreciation inherent in each culture's artistic expression. Whilst, the key elements of a culture can be understand intuitively through its arts, a more structured understanding of the essential themes of expression can help to add depth and order to this understanding. This has been remarkably informed by Leuthold's theoretical statement in terms of approaching the question of identity and its relation to art,

"A clear cultural identity functions as evidence of the legitimacy of the nation as an independent political unit. Art can play a part in the reclaiming



of past knowledge that may have been lost or suppressed during the period of exploitation and repression by outside states. This art may not be recognized immediately as “innovative” because it makes use of traditional tropes and styles, but it still serves a function in the service of national identity.” (Leuthold, 2011, p.64)

One of the interesting shortcomings of formalism that emerged in my current artistic focus and its related art production is that the key of communicating and connecting meaning of my paintings is not merely located in its formal structure. Subject matter, such as transcends boundaries of place and time, can significantly provide further understanding and additional clues or codes as to the interpretation and reading in order to obtain a further understanding and appreciation of an inventive artwork. In doing so, I refer here to Leuthold’s critical statement,

“Still, the notion that the most important aspects of art is the part that is universal cosmopolitan in important stands as a powerful argument against the tie between nation or nationalism and art. From a universal perspective, the national is too limiting to be of much interest.” (Leuthold, 201, p. 67)



Figure (7): Abumeis; ‘The crescent moon’ (2004)



Implicitly or explicitly, it is thought that there are what might be called oppositions / objections while thinking about art in relation to nationalism. An ideal example of this turns back to what has been represented in the mind of postmodernists arguments against understanding art in relationship to nationalism and the postmodern perspective. As for western philosophies and theorists, the dilemma of Nationalism frames the idea of origin and 'notion'. Whereas, multi-layered, collective, or hybrid identities, produce certain mobilities from the experience of growing up in between two cultures: immigration, Diaspora, and the experience of connecting and practicing cross-cultures.

All these cases seem to confront and challenge those mentioned relating to Western perspectives toward national 'loyalty' and allegiance. In this sense, this contradictory position can be employed as attitude and dimension which challenge the idea that the 'belonging' response to nationalism can serve as a primary structure of art making and appreciation. Another possible argumentative claim against understanding art in relation to nationalism as Leuthold (2011) argues, is that the global movements such as 'African-ism' and 'Islamic fundamentalism transcend national concerns.' (P. 65 - 67)



Figure (8): Abumeis; 'Vibration of national identity 1' (2004)



Figure (9): Abumeis; 'Vibration of national identity 2' (2004)

These global movements include the several current states instanced by the impact of 'globalization' and new 'technology' can be stages in the

formalization of nationalism. This should include the issues related to art's 'secularization' and the intercultural importance of this process, which has to be under consideration. In relation to this issue, Leuthold investigated the origin of the collective function of art; he provides a comparative explanation of the significance of art, and points out in his theoretical statement,

"Despite the secularization of art's function and meaning dulling the previous two hundred years, religious and spiritual theories of art continue to direct us toward its cross - cultural significance. However, even though spirituality, if not religion, remains an important intercultural issue in art today, art has grown increasingly secular in recent history."(Leuthold, 2011, p. 5)

Taken literally, the influence of these arguments brings my individual conceptual framework to integration and its approach to transnationalism, which becomes fertile ground for reconstructing the transformative sources based on art practice. In doing so, the dilemma of my national identity and its complex structure has been reconstructed and then replaced by the following chapters, in particular by the term of 'hybridity' as a way to express the concerns toward 'nationalism'. In consequence, a transnational movement has emerged through the professional engagement related to this research-based project.

### **Conclusion of chapter one**

Throughout this chapter, I turned to the dilemma of a national identity in order to draw conclusions concerning the significance of understanding art in relation to 'nationalism', and as a departure point for this journey. I utilized the case studies of individuality to emphasize and extend the significance of my transformative practice seeking to create meaning through painting. Working on the research questions, I have asked: in what ways can I use my identity complex construction themes to contribute to knowledge within the context of contemporary art? Through taking a relational approach to 'Nationalism', the social and historical shift from the concern with the dilemma of national identity and the exploration of complexity of "nationalism", this assists me to illuminate the approach in which the category-themes, African-Arabic-and Muslim have dominated the construction of my national identity. In this sense, the dimension of the blended themes should be one where social definition and demography

can possibly meet and embrace. This social recognition is reflected through the inclusion of these mixed themes.

The project discusses the components of themes such as 'ethnic' identification: integrated racial background, shared cultural traits, a sense of belonging or a personal affirmation of identity. This analysis of ethnic style refers to my construction identity themes which help me understanding the interaction of these three aspects of identification. The experience of identity themes is employed to test the validity of the experiences of the 'other', from the perspective of diasporic sensibility and displacement. The point is each of these themes permits me to quantify and unify the others throughout the complex question of identity. This transformative process points out the evaluative dimensions of construction that narrows 'Nationalism's boundaries. Through this chapter a clear indication has emerged that the way in which I constructed my national identity might be changed or reconstructed over time.

The chapter builds to the conclusion that, practicing and understanding art in relationship to nationalism can lead to consumption of an identity and exaggeration which in consequence approaches an ideological appreciation and limited reflection. However, this project develops the idea that key themes of my national identity were fundamental for understanding and framing 'Nationalism'. The organizing idea about focusing on the dilemma of national identity is to define boundaries as a point of departure of this journey. This will serve as background for the following chapters, and for gaining an introductory knowledge which has frequently developed across expanded boundaries of present place, space and time.

# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two

### Project Two

#### **‘In Between ‘Over Here’ and ‘Over There’**

##### **Introduction**

In the chapter one I discussed the dilemma of national identity in order to articulate and invoke the perception of ‘Nationalism’. My purpose was to approach a new understanding to art in relation to national identity. This chapter two included the following chapters three and four consider the intellectual, cultural and social dynamics of individual thought towards 'transnationalism' that have had a powerful impact on my journey here in Australia. They chapters define and explain that migration, hybridity and multiculturalism are as major intercultural aspects in transnationalism.



Figure (10): Abumeis; ‘In between ‘over here’ and ‘over there’ 1’ (2010)

The objective of this second chapter is to identify key factors that proved formative to my own thoughts concerning my response to Australia. Whilst the determination in chapter one focuses on the perception of the national identity in relation to art, I will here explore how my personal interaction with the cultural spheres was formative to the development of my new approaches to belonging. I

have entitled 'In between over here and over there', focused on how artists respond to cultural differences and their positioning within cultural intersections. My aim in this chapter is to synthesize boundaries. I have a very personal stance in that my temporary stay/migration attachment to Australia evoked a rethinking of my artistic identity and art practice. There was a sense of urgency raised by the 'dilemma' of national identity, which is reflected in the context and content of this chapter, as well as the over-arching research questions of this thesis.

### **Welcome home: two colours, textures, and two cultures**

The topic brings up both contemporary and historical sources and examples, incorporating a case study cross intercultural spaces in between 'over here' Australia and 'over there' Libya. The content addresses intercultural issues in art 'a sense of place, space, time, identity and belonging'. Art and social orders are constructions that formulate our understanding of art as practice-lead research. This project provides an introduction to aesthetic concepts, expanding the discussion beyond Western theorists and Australian influence. It has implications in the emergence of new expectation of symbolic cultural and art practice in an individual perspective and from a transnational framework.



Figure (11): Abumeis; 'When I was here I want to be there... and vice versa' (2009)

I explore my own experience of shifting meanings of home by exploring the effects of the rupture of leaving my 'home' in Libya. In particular my concern

was to analyse the effect of the dynamic of variables and surroundings that play their roles on the reformation of my identity and art. This reflective stream within my paintings addresses the existential concern and challenge of being struggling with not being on the periphery, this relief as Amal Treacher said “lies alongside with the wish to be there, to return and above all that I had never left.” Cited by Brah and Coombes (2000, p. 104)

Through the series of my paintings related to this project, for instance my paintings; *When I was here I want to be there... and vice versa* (2009) and *In between ‘over here’ and ‘over there’* (1 and 2) (2010), I evoke to construct my living across boundaries, and to establish transnational practices which permit me to deal with my both memberships the immigration country and the country of origin. And enable me to be part or as fragment of two countries and to reconstruct my home transformation.

In this project I refer to my own experience and to the connections with what might be identified 'beyond Nationalism'. I explore issues concerning migration and hybridity, for instance, the series of my paintings entitled ‘In between ‘over here’ and ‘over there’ (2010-2011), suggests metaphorical legacy in terms of the ways I came to be welcomed 'home' and became to be as a fragment of two parts who sought to provide a civilized framework of living in across boundaries. This perhaps explains my concerns with my identity and possibility of cultural conflict, as well as my tendency perhaps with a need to forge an attachment to a particular location. The painting *In between ‘over here’ and ‘over there’* (2010) is an example that the artwork was influenced by the experience of life day in Australia, and belong to this reflective stream. It brings together notion of place and space that test the possibilities and complexities of identity and belonging. In observation of this project two, the home themes are explored in the context of place, space, time, cultural identity and Australian influence in relation to transnationalism.

### **Hybridity and its manifestations**

It has been stated by Brah and Coombes (2000) “Much contemporary criticism has focused on hybridity as a sign of the productive emergence of new cultural forms” (p. 9). It is claimed that the benefit derived from this theory to me is that



hybridity with such insight, knowledge and understanding, refers to Hall and Bhabha. This framing context influenced the way my own intellectual and art practice as a displaced painter try to forge new ways of signifying hybridity. This has been the case for many transnational artists, included myself. Taken literally, the conceptual and theoretical statement by Brah and Coombes that “‘Hybridity’ started life as a biological term, used to describe the outcome of a crossing of two plants or species.” (2000, p. i). From this context, it can be considered that the series of my paintings ‘In between over here and over there’ (2009-2012), is an attempt to transform the experience that occurs by the constant movement across cultures, and moving from one place to another. This has created a sort of hybrid mode and articulation.



Figure (12): Abumeis; ‘Shifting meanings across boundaries’ (2011)

The recent body of my artwork, for example, expresses the condition of in-between-ness and dominant culture and artistic order at the local and global levels. It implicates that practicing art (painting) can be as Brah and Coombes describe that as one of “productive sites for hybrid interactions that might be described as cultural exchange” (2000, p. 1 - 103). On the other hand, this recognition or transformation of hybridity in an individual frame and personal experience paradoxically provides a platform for claiming an essential reproduction by enabling certain constituencies to mobilize around issues such



the questions of identity and belonging. As for Hall (1996) who was engaged with the term of “Centralism”<sup>13</sup> in relation to contemporary cultural studies, and due to the influence of displaced intellectuals, he concluded that immigrants are in a position of being able to construct new hybrid identities. I would like to turn here to the work of a further three key thinkers in this field, Homi Bhabha, Garica Canceling, and John Kraniauskas, who have transformed the notion of 'hybridity'. Kraniauskas said in his article “Hybridity” in a transnational frame,

“At another level, contemporary reflection on cultural form and practices in an increasingly globalised world - the hybrid as specific global - local configurations - also stresses cultural mixture, and underlines the way in which subjects are always already marked by 'others', identity by alterity.” Brah and Coombes (2000, p.239)

The hybridity as interpreted by John Kraniauskas; he said "the idea of 'hybridity' has become increasingly rethought from the point of view of time". According to Braha and Coombes (2000, p. 240). They refer to Bhabha's concern with borders of time *"Time - lag keeps alive the meaning of the past": it 'implies the "past", projects it'* (1994a, p.254) My determination, from which I took the notion of hybridity as interpreted by Bhabha is about evoking memory as a reliable form of reference which have direct reflections on history as a catalyst that brought up the past to bear on the present. This issue is developed in more detail in Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) which is concerned with the idea of hybridity. This book has proved invaluable in helping me to think through some of the issues of this chapter/thesis. In the reading of *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha in his analysis of contemporary processes of hybridization suggests that an explanation of hybridity can emerge within a transnational society and represent manifestations of capitalism.

The theoretical and metaphorical importance of the idea of hybridity as formulated in my hybrid artworks thus emerges as a response to the needs and

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<sup>13</sup> Hall, S. (1996a). The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual. In D. C. Morley, Kuan - Hsing (Ed.), *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (p. 484 - 503). London: Routledge.

demands on the present refers to my temporary migration in Australia. In other words, as an artist who seeks to engage in a transnational practice and society. It is very obvious that these demands are substantial for it is set to be delivered at a different level. It is at this level that the concept of my hybrid art practice refers to what I would call my 'Melbourne paintings' as a critical articulation and a strategic interpretation. Taken together, these reflections deliver my paintings into the conceptual space as Bhabha's principal concern and references to 'intercultural hybridization' (Brah & Coombes 2000, P.245 - 246). According to the collective feedback that I gathered from my solo shows in Australia, the current stage of my own art practice is the product of an inter-crossing of borders.



Figure (13): Abumeis; 'In between 'over here' and 'over there' 2' (2010)

The paintings explore the preoccupation of contextualizing the concept of the integration in between the two borders 'over here' Australia and 'over there' Libya. The narrative in the paintings' title itself serves as a metaphor for 'hybridity' and of acknowledging the individual context in which the terms of the debate articulate. Thus, my current art practice has been mobilized in the cultural sphere that serves precisely as an institutional framework, brings to the foreground the intersection of discourses cross-two cultures and art practices mobilizing hybridity in the form of painting.

Importantly, I do not have any concern or tendency to judge cross - cultural values or differences. However, I have been influenced by Leuthold's theoretical statement 'The homogenization of cultures is often associated with the international impact of mass culture's expressive forms.' (2011, p. 18) My analysis and re-creation of the masterpiece of Australian modernist painting John Brack's *Collins St, 5.pm*<sup>14</sup> (1955), is an example of one instance of cross-cultural interpretation, value and utilization. As Leuthold (2011) argues "One of the ways that meaning crosses cultures is that one recognizes aspects of oneself in the cultural Other."<sup>15</sup> This sense and mode also can be found in my 'Melbourne paintings'<sup>16</sup>. From a personal context, the outcome of this art practice lead to research was manifested as result of profound searching throughout intercultural spaces and for cross - cultural patterns, not to mention, approach to judgment, valuation or any comparative concern.

The manifestations of cultural contact and change can be seen in different contexts. One approach of this and according to Leuthold 'For theorists such as Bhabha, characterizing modern culture as a complex process of mutual interaction that yields hybrid creations is a more accurate way to approach questions of cross - cultural practices' (2011, p. 19). Such is the process, throughout some of my experimental artworks, I followed a pattern of cultural incorporation in which I attempted to absorb aspects of Australian identity, art and culture, and then confirmed these aspects to the functional relations of the original art and culture system. My painting *Collins St, 5.pm*<sup>17</sup> is an example of that; it is a form of hybridity that maintains the character of original art and local culture. Some other products of my art were replaced by contact with the new surrounding and cultural systems. Beyond that and the research questions, there is an attempt to see how close the boundaries can possibly be met.

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<sup>14</sup> Details in the chapter four

<sup>15</sup> Leuthold, S. (2011, p. 17). *Cross – Cultural Issues in Art: Frames for Understanding*. Routledge. New York and London.

<sup>16</sup> Discussed in the chapter three and four.

<sup>17</sup> The key painting for my investigation which well be discussed in chapter/project four.

Within my current experience of fragmentation which occurs as a key component of contemporary use of hybridity; diverse cultures are juxtaposed and interacted, forming new approach to my identity, and producing a distinctive artistic dialogue. This product significantly and substantially emerged as a sophisticated approach through my current experience with exile and cross-cultural influence and exchange. From my point of view, my paintings exhibit the hybridizing tendencies that my intellectual and artistic framework have been concerned to identify as creative ideas and practice within a global cultural order.

These 'hybrid' paintings reveal that the presentation of my objects is culturally blended and the debate has shifted considerably to destroy the stability of cultural boundaries, while I expect cultural change to result in what can be called 'acculturation'. My main claim, however, is that the evocation of integration 'hybridity' as this framing intellectual which has to be recognized primarily as a key step for my art practice as it increasingly approaches 'Transnationalism'.

### **Changing 'home' and transnational shifting of meanings**

The changing relationship in between 'over there' my homeland Libya and 'over here' Australia as my temporary migration place and a 'home' has revealed an almost substantial characteristic of transnational migration, and the dynamic consequences of this relationship generated new approaches to transformation of home and the construction of a transnational identity. The meaning of 'home' for me has been changing and regenerating, this can be formed by my new surroundings; the space of cultural engagement and art practice.

"The geographic notion of place and historical sense of connections can no longer contextualize the concept of our obsession where we belong" (Benson, M. O'Reilly, 2009, p.2).

The project thus contextualize belonging and illustrates some impacts that affect the process of transformation and interpretation individually response to changing circumstances. There is the belief that the meaning of home has conveyed a kind of heritage as traces of our antecedents and spirituality as sacred place and place, from which every plan in journey we do in our day live starts from. From this dimension, mapping elsewhere would be pointed from a

home as a physical point, mapping the world stars with the singular point of a home. From this dimension, home would be the centre of the universe.

Home

A sort of honour, not a building site

Wherever we are, when, if we chose we might

Be somewhere else, but trust we have chosen right.

W. H. Auden, 'In Wartime' (1942)

Papastergiadis (1998, p. 8)

From this perspective, the idealistic home is more a symbolic space than a physical place called home; it is a kind of space where a personal and social meaning are came into unit. The theorist Papastergiadis (1998) indicates, the disconnected with a place due the lack of social space and cultural engagement causes the experience of 'exile'<sup>18</sup>, as result; the exile becomes self – realized of the essential needs of integration in a home, and dynamic boundaries of belonging. Home has to be argued, has traditional meanings which were linked to meaning of identity and belonging also has commonly been linked to family and homeland or even nation. In contrast, and from a transnational perspective, the distinction and movement between 'over here' and 'over there' is that the conceptions of home are dynamic rather not static.



L: Figure (14): Abumeis; 'from over there' (2009)

M: Figure (15): Abumeis 'the condition of in-betweenness' (2009)

R: Figure (16): Abumeis 'to over here' (2009)

There is a growing understanding within the context of transnational nature of contemporary migration, particularly in such transnational communities, that migrants are able to construct their lives across boundaries, and to establish transnational practices which permit them to deal both with their membership of

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<sup>18</sup> Papastergiadis, N. (1998, p. 1- 8). Dialogues in the Diasporas. River Oram Press: London & New York.

the immigration country and their country of origin. “Transnationalism allows an understanding of migrants as no longer caught in the trap between either assimilation or nostalgia and the ‘myth of return’” said Anwar. According to Al – Ali and Koser (2002, p. 51-53) In this sense, the significance of my art practice as a transnational painter and its impact in the transformation process is the extent to which it embowers me to approach reconstructing a sense of ‘home’<sup>19</sup> in a different culture, transforming it in way in which it is possible to effect a fluid integration of past and present, over here and over there. Therefore ‘home’ becomes a place where there is no necessary contradiction in juxtaposing sense of places and time, and being part or fragment of two countries.

### **Cultural Conflict**

Migrants came from somewhere else; the main reason for population migration is due the lack of opportunities at home. However, many immigrant artists including me, experience conflicting cultural experiences of living in displacement. The theorist Leuthold has strong theoretical views about ‘Otherness’; he claims that “The contact, conflict, negotiation, and conciliation between members of different cultures and races is a central global themes of the last fifty years” (2011, p. xi). From this perspective, Amal Treacher points in her theoretical statement to the ‘diasporic’ sensibility refer to her personal experience, she says:

“Whatever our histories of diaspora we all inhabit contradictory wishes and impulses: longings to be elsewhere and hearing to be home. I have wished to be in Cairo and I have wished never to return there. Similarly, I have wished to have no home other than London and also wished wholeheartedly to live anywhere but here.” Said Treacher, Brah and Coombes (2000, p. 104)

Personally, the experience of exile and ‘displacement’ continues to play influential roles on my life and art due to my ongoing travel across international

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Transnationalism’ has concerned with the definitions of ‘home’ which are fundamentally linked to the relationship between migrants and their communities with the social, political, economic and cultural spaces. (Al - Ali, N., Koser, K. 2002, p. 6)

borders over ten years. I have experienced conflicting cultural experience of living in different places such as England and America. However, if I had to compare that with my current experience here in Australia, I would possibly be able to distinguish the emergence of differences refer to the social, cultural and political movement that promoted a kind of tolerance, inclusion, acceptance and non-bigotry. In doing so, I will engage in a renegotiation of my artistic identity providing a temporary framing to it. As Lola Young argues in her article *Hybridity's Discontents*,

“Analytical, evaluation accounts of the various modes of contemporary cultural encounters, the fluid circuits of identification, the instances of a double - consciousness which are concerned with the contradictions of being hybrid and essentialized simultaneously are required to help us understand our ever - shifting positions of identification.” Brah and Coombes (2000, p.167)

Thus, the transformation of shifting meanings and positions through this project is a practice that emerges in a context marked by conflictual differences and culture. The concept of cultural difference provides me with vital critical resources and an influential interpretation which makes my new approach to notion of place, space and time, possible. This turn has produced crucial understanding for the ways I experience living, myself, places and others. I have achieved so with experience of boundaries and time. For example, throughout my series of paintings *In between over here and over there* and *Place embrace*, I am evoking a discipline here for the impact of my actual experience. These ideas underpin how I integrate two places within the psyche of my art practice.

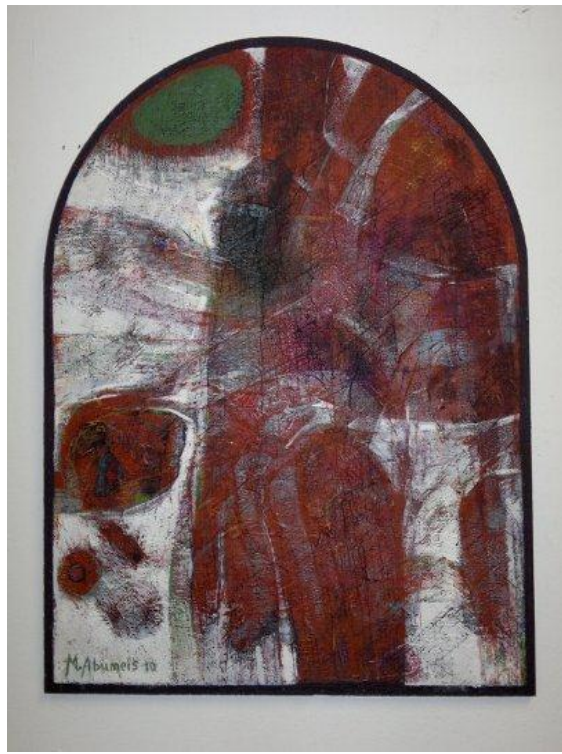


Figure (17): Abumeis; 'Conceptual Zones for intercultural communication' (2011)

My current art practice suggests a struggle with the cultural conflict, meanings and complexities and to appreciate past and present. It positions my condition in place of indifference which permits me to be able to remember and forget. This experience as nostalgic, for me as a displaced artist can be possibly a gesture, an expression or metaphor for a good relationship with the past. According to Treacher, as Foucault argues 'nostalgia can be a good and necessary feeling as long as it is not based on aggression or contempt for the present' cited by Brah and Coombes (2000, p.105) However, Morgan (2008) makes claim for a diasporic sensibility in a theoretical sense, it reflects a tension between acculturation and resistance cross-cultural spaces which is characteristic of the position of a transnational art practice. He claimed,

“I argue that the diasporic view is not of minority interest but is inherently progressive since the operation of identity construction and nationalism are increasingly relevant to awareness of the local and global.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Morgan, Les. (2008, p.1). *The Significance of Diaspora Politics in the Visual Arts*. VIDM Verlag Dr. Muller: USA & UK.





Figure (18): Abumeis; 'Fertility Season' (2009)

In this sense, a fundamental hypothetical question has to be positioned; would these challenges, encounters and conflicts have been rational, expectable or avoidable, if communities expanded borderlines that offered a profound understanding and appreciation of the signifiers that are transformed in the art of otherness? Would these conflicts have been mitigated if members of different cultures understood that others, through their art, are expressing ideas related to universal human themes - the for spiritual growth, for a sense of place and space and belonging, and for an authentic cultural identity - that have been, at the same time, developed within one's own cultural tradition? (Leuthold 201, p.xii) We wish for that. However, it would draw here that there is a potential for cross-cultural understanding and appreciation inherent in each culture's artistic expression.

### **The evaluation of exile**

As I/we have/had dreams about some places of the global as comprehensible transnational spaces, the story of exile and its primary stereotype begins with those accumulations, include a culture and language abscission. The story of exile is 'endless' and 'featureless'; it has no specific end, time, or place. It has

connectivity with individuality and personal experiences. I am marking a place here for the impact of actual experience in intercultural spaces, this challenge to how I make a home and how I integrate two places within the experience of boundary. This turn has produce new a approach for my art practice leads to research. This knowledge of the complexity of living, of other, and my passion and feeling, profoundly influences experiences and fantasies. Thus, the experience of living, otherness, places, and myself depends on the extent to which I come alongside with a knowledge of differences and experiences of boundary. (Brah, A. Coomes,A. 2000, p. 104)

Through my art practice-led research, I wish to struggle with the cultural elimination, conflict, complexities and meanings and to appreciate past and present. Also, I am edging towards drawing out 'ambivalence' the state of having mixed feeling. The influential and emotional scope is centred, in part, on the scope to find a spot in a space of in-difference, and overall to be able to remember and forget. From this perspective, the evaluation of exile is possibly effects a fluid integration of past and present, over there and over here; where there is no necessary contradiction in juxtaposing sense of places and time. In this formulation, several interesting implications were accrued; new approaches to belonging - interpreting knowledge in the art form painting - this emerges as a structure embodying subjects and meaning, through history, function, materials, and biology.

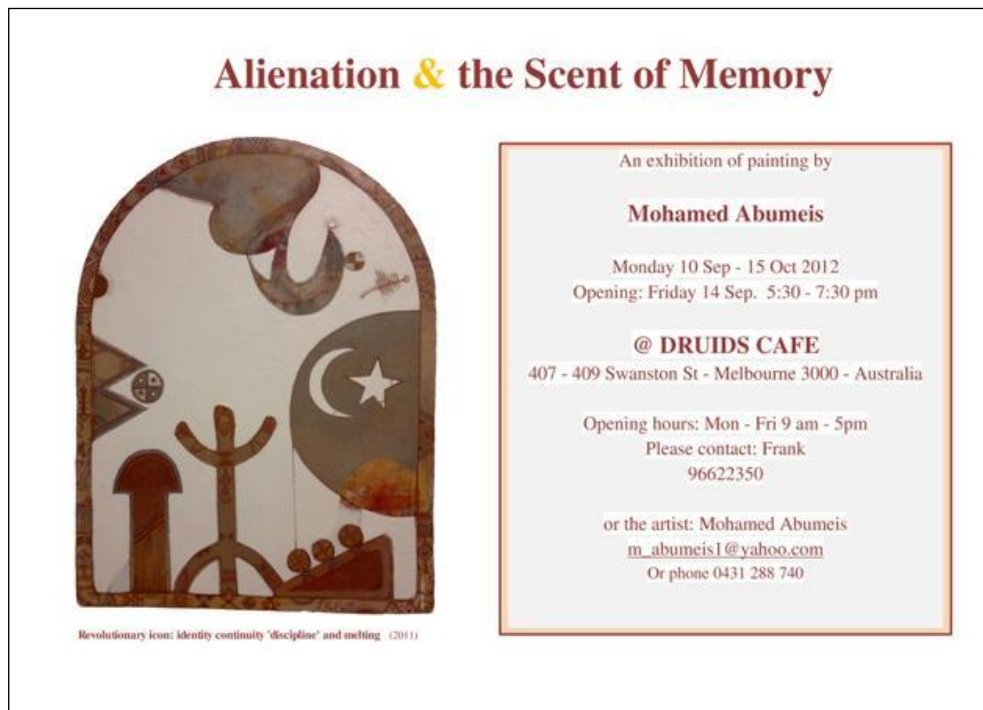


Figure (19): The poster of my solo show 'Alienation and the Scent of Memory' (2012)

My solo exhibition under the title *Alienation and the Scent of Memory*<sup>21</sup>, is relevant to this. In part it provokes nostalgia, evoking the actual losses of family, friends and scenes which signified both my internal life and external environment. It may also be seen to provoke what might be called a loss of a romantic past.

The experience of re-addressing the past and evoking the scent of memory in exile, in part, might be a metaphor for being nostalgic<sup>22</sup>. Referring to Foucault's theoretical statement, my paintings *Exile Pillow* and *The Scent of Memory in Exile* (2011) and *Welcome Home: When I was here I want to be there... and vice versa* (2009) emerged as consequences of such a nostalgic attitude. In doing so, the memory of past and history itself can be a clue as to where to start. From this perspective, the scent of my memory in exile has been converted into a catalyst for finding and integrating subjects. On a complex level, the effort of re-addressing the past may offer a vital way of articulating the significance of

<sup>21</sup> At Druids Cafe– Melbourne (2012)

<sup>22</sup> For such a nostalgia can be an expression of a good relationship to the past and, as Foucault suggests that "nostalgia can be a good and necessary feeling as long as it is not based on aggression or contempt for the present." Brah and Coombes (2000, p. 105)

transformations in the construction of historical memory. The use of this sense in this context enhances the significance of the research questions and objectives in particular about the boundaries of time and a place.



Figure (20): Abumeis; 'Exile pillow' (2011)



Figure (21): Abumeis; 'The scent of memory in exile' (2011)

Interestingly, it can be argued here that a lived experience can never be solid, it is fluid and dynamic. My current journey in Australia would seem partly to take on the form of conscious memorization or temporization that brings the past to pair with the present spontaneously. In this sense, it is a kind of satisfaction and relief to practice art and have a life that can be more fluid and mobile which does not restrict me as a painter. In doing so, and in order to adopt the structuring values of transnationalism, the purpose of evolution of exile has destroyed the conventional perception of my identity, and simultaneously resulted liberating a new personal art movement and sense of place. Thus, the following chapters/projects will dominate the research question to approach more the perception of space and place in order to address issues regarding the sense of place within a transnational conceptual framework and perspective.

## **Conclusion of chapter two**

This project establishes theoretical linkages in between over here and over there; it advocates the need for a systematic view of art in creating cross-cultural understanding. The outcome of this chapter shares certain features with the ongoing debates on cross-cultural issues in art, shifting meaning of home, hybridity, and transnationalism. It has indicated that ‘hybridity’ and its maturity challenge the perception of ‘Nationalism. In contrast, the approach taken enhances the established ideas about the research questions of collective identity, notions of a place and space, and approaches to belonging.

Through taking a relational approach to ‘transnationalism’, and practicing both living conditions in between ‘over here’ and ‘over there’, I seek to catalyze the personal experience of migration and adjustment within two cultures by focusing on identity ‘concealing and revealing’, personal and cultural barriers. This integration of the present and left behind knowledge enriches the conversations and enhance this creative process, which results a voice for individual insights, and makes a valuable contribution to the project.

It can be drawn from this chapter that it is a relief to practice in a way of art and have a life that can be more fluid and mobile which does not constrain me as an artist. Expressing the changing relationship between ‘over here’ as attached to my temporary migrant situation and ‘over there’ my ‘homeland’, has revealed a most substantial characteristic of being transnational artist. The dynamic consequences of this relationship generated new approaches to transformation of home as a means to develop dynamic approaches to migration and the construction of a transnational identity.

# Chapter Three



## Chapter Three

### Project Three

#### ‘Narrative in Colour and Texture’

##### Introduction

This chapter describes how narrative was appropriated as method for my artistic visual language. In this chapter I discuss how my personal experience was the engine for the development of my studio practice. It draws upon ideas and case studies from cultural and critical observation, contemporary and art history, philosophy, theory, aesthetics and integrating studio (painting).

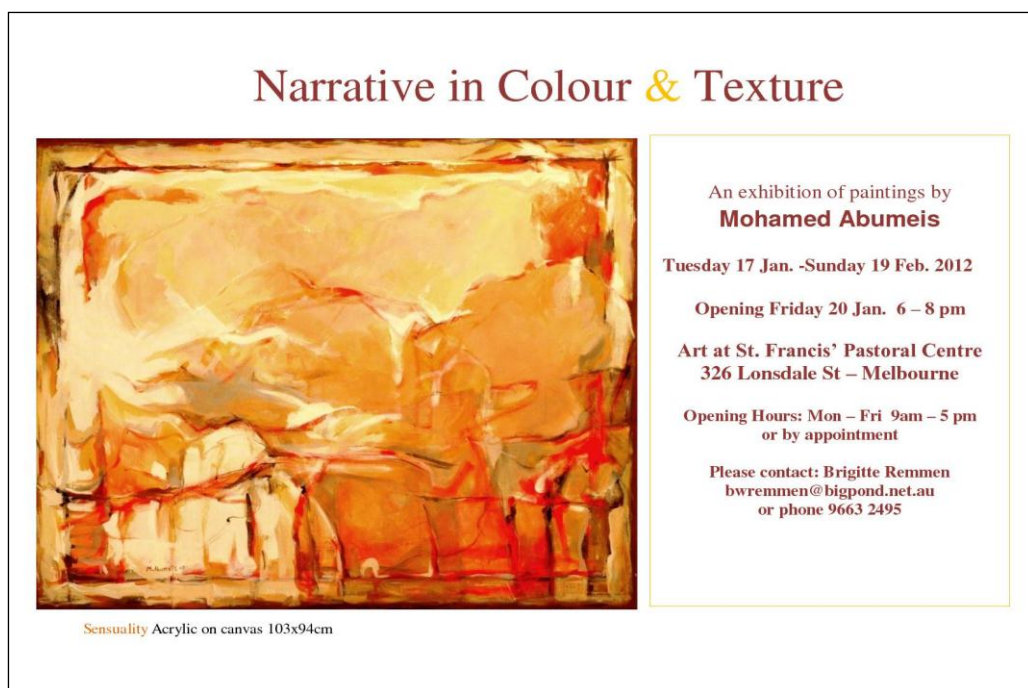


Figure (22): The poster of my solo show ‘Narrative in colour and texture’ (2012)

Relevant to this project, my solo exhibition under the title *Narrative in Colour and Texture*<sup>23</sup>, in part I focus on instances, to create a perspective on art that is lyrical in its focus on embracing places, spaces and time. With a painterly style of a colourful contemporary ‘epic’ that textured with a sense of indigenous aesthetics, and refreshing with the utilizing of appropriated theories. In short, this project provides an overview of progressing with stylistic concern, professional development, documentation, and integrating Studio practice.

<sup>23</sup> (17 Jan – 19 Feb 2012) at Art at St. Francis’ Pastoral Centre – Melbourne.

### **Integrating studio: studio as space and place**

The substance of this project attempts to demonstrate that my current research leads to art practice is a contemporary innovative form which derives from thoughtful and truthful lived experience and contact. A studio as space and place is an essential site for practicing art enquiry and the place where the inner-self and means of expression can be tested, and the place in which new knowledge is generated in the form of art works. This space of filtering ideas and knowledge, bringing personal insights, learning happens in making and through conversations which enable artists to practice, discuss global issues and create an institutional dialogue as an exchange of ideas and knowledge and as a cultural contribution. (Mannall, Sally. 2010, p. 2 - 4) A studio as conceptual space and place is always a dependent voice of artistic expression of an artist. As for many of transnational artists' experiences, included I, are crystallized throughout the social and psychological space that they create for themselves, at their 'sacred places' – studios, rather than homes;

For my practice, my studio is a 'sacred' place and space. It is my 'home',  
'mosque', 'church', and my 'temple'. It is the place of;  
searching/making; focusing/refining;  
observing/reflecting; responding/filtering;  
inspiring/influencing; connecting/exploring;  
interpreting/transforming; creating/documenting

This project is an exploration of the possibilities for transforming the new contemporary surrounding variables. While exploration is something more usually associated with a text and words, it is perhaps appropriate in my case of practicing through studio as required by my course of study Doctor of Fine Art. Such as the use of colour and texture where the metaphor of my new palette occurred and essentialized various codes, linguistic models, and a narrative that invites a performative reading. This integration of studio enriches the conversations and enhances the creative process, which results in a voice to individual insights and makes a valuable strength to this research. Explicitly and implicitly, an integration studio has proven effectively and substantially in reflections on the questions and methodology of research, subjectivity and



articulation. Searching and making at my space/studio and progressing with artworks produces a shift by focusing on colour and texture as codes and language.

This approach to a new language helps me to speak my voice by way of accessible critical narratives which I feel relate to my circumstance today, time, space and place, the lived experience and a response to Melbourne.



Figure (23): My studio space, building 49 RMIT University - Melbourne

Conceptually, a studio became 'home'; the fantasy and imagined world response to my art practice became the actual world. The world is where I would have to engage in forging a place, space and time which can convey and carry the complexity of lived experience and meanings. This shift of emphasis has been based on knowledge of two places (over here and over there) that are brought together, not divided. And considerably to be conformed to standards of satisfactory, particularly for the purposes of integrating boundaries and embracing places into a form of painting. Colour and texture are theorised as the most prominent elements on my current integration to studio.

## Progressing with colour and texture

My further progression with colour and texture aims to provide innovative approaches to, and individual perspectives on, the research based art practice. I investigated through studio based work; explored and examined methods, materials and techniques. Being inspired by the literature, I began to use thickly textured impasto, the techniques sought to approach a result in textural richness, but a more important aim is the exploration of the transformative qualities of this painterly method. My concern on purely pictorial issues; experimentation with colour and texture has been informed by the conceptual works of Paul Klee and Antoni Tapies as the case of study of my studio method, which enabled me to developed my personal concept and metaphor of colour and texture.



Left - Figure (24): Abumeis; 'Progressing with texture: Melbourne surface' (2010)

Right - Figure (25): Abumeis; 'Tapiés and Klee just passed from here: my metaphorical texture has just emerged' (2010)

In doing so, and in order to adopt the structuring values of 'transnationalism', I wanted my art practice to explicitly engage with intellectual and critical dialogues in cultural studies, so I appropriated studio methods essential to my task. Colour and texture technically aim to play significant role as a means to bring space, place, movement, time, and even objects into my painting; as metaphor for layers of lived experience and a collective identity and as approach to narrative. The concern with identity and notions of space and place gives me a

sense of meaning for both my life and art. I intensively developed my previous palette of earth tones. The adoption of earthly tones was followed by the identity commitment.



Figure (26): Abumeis; 'Reflection of Australian influence 1' (2010)

Figure (27): Abumeis; 'Reflection of Australian influence 2' (2010)

My interest in colour continued to develop throughout my journey in Australia. I have begun to use several new tones of colours in my palette. The reference to the colourful palette is related to the notion of Multiculturalism. In evoking the sense of commitment that led me on a constant search for new directions in my painting and as a means for following up my study and experimentation, I have embarked on a new investigation of colour which has made a major change in my palette and which still continues to change considerably.

### **My 'Australian' palette (new palette)**

Searching within different cultural spaces and through the emergence of new ideas, and via independent thought for a new approach to independent thought, led me to establish my new palette, which I would call my "Australian palette". I felt I could express things with colours that I couldn't speak of in any other way. I have been influenced by my favourite quotation of Paul Klee's statement, *"Colour is the place where our brain and universe come together and meet"*<sup>24</sup> Thus, Colours became my world; I feel that I am fragment of colour, and we have to be as one.

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<sup>24</sup> Kudielka, Robert., Rilley, Bridget. (2002, p. 42). Paul Klee: The Nature of Creation. Hayward Gallery in Association with Lund Humphries: London.



Taking literally what Klee stated in his conceptual and theoretical statement enabled me to develop my metaphor of colour for the city sub- themes of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. Colour in my 'Melbourne' paintings as mentioned by Klee represents a multi-layered construction of Australian contemporary society, including bustling cityscapes. The colours fuse and melt onto each other to reveal unity and acceptance, and thus an opportunity to find a place in this complex system to explore my journey of a lived experience in Melbourne.



Figure (28): Abumeis; detail of 'Collins street, 5.pm' (2010)

I eventually came to realize that the preoccupation with the new palette has in fact developed the meaning of colours, and therefore provided a way of transforming self – knowledge. Colour and texture within my new palette became regular features, functioning as part of the narrative, in much the same way as the subject matter of the painting.

The discipline imposed by the need to observe the tonal balance of the different aspects of a landscape and places was a factor on my colour experimentation which expanded significantly with a new range of colours; (Red and Yellow) Ochre – (Deep) vermilion – purple – Naples and (Cadmium) Yellow – (Cadmium) Orange - pink – Cobalt violet – red - Cobalt Blue – Cobalt Green –

Ivory Black – charcoal Grey – white. I employed gesture, allusion, narrative in colour and texture and even titles as a way of revealing my personal view and as a response to place. This colourful Australian palette presented over the paintings surface reflected my individual concept and metaphor for the role of the city in the context of cultural /social diversity and dynamism.



Figure (29): Abumeis; 'Transnational skin colour: collective identity' (2010)

Both this project (3) and the following project (4) engage with several aspects of the city of Melbourne as sub-themes; in particular they address the central issue of how to theorize the question of the city's roles on the emergence of multiculturalism. In my 'Melbourne' paintings, I was concerned with rendering objects and form with colour, visual rhythm, poetic feeling, a rich palette with symbolic colours and a depth of feeling. My aim was to visualize the role of Melbourne city – the phenomena of multiculturalism, the city as a human river (crowds) and its multi-layered colours of people.

### **My 'Melbourne' paintings: and the emergence of transnational art practice**

In order to demonstrate the research questions and aims, this chapter will explore my own art practice. It turns to my personal experience of integration and approach to transnationalism in order to reveal how this era was formative to development of my individual approach to identity, belonging and art. I wanted my 'Melbourne' paintings to explicitly engage with new approaches to identity

and transnational art practice, so I appropriated studio methods essential to my tasks. It is therefore the pictorial depiction that was of central concern in my studio practice. For example, my 'Melbourne paintings' provide a platform which transforms my individual intellectual and creative development. This body of artworks presents the cultural possibilities of positioning itself as a hybrid art form.

In order to reflect on my art studio production, I have utilized the work of key theorists to provide critical interpretation and analysis. For example, in reference to Leuthold's book *Cross-Cultural Issues in Art* (2011), and his attempt to draw the interrelationship between art and sense of place, he said 'A sense of place is developed through the interrelation of several elements: poetry and literature, art, religion, social life, and views of nature.' He also claimed that 'A sense of place involves specific physical ties to a location as well as understandings of nature that are part of world-view.' (p.163)

Taking this literally, this project considers how my art expresses a sense of place, with some examples drawn from my personal lived experiences. In exploring the ways of how a sense of place can be generated in my painting, I became aware that a sense of space and place is one of a major pillars of I/one's "belonging" to a location, a group or community, and, as a consequence, the diversity of intercultural relations. Within my 'Melbourne' paintings, places, spaces, external landscape, tangible and intangible objects, and sensations, all these are internalized which reconstitute my identity for forming my own sense of relationship to the external world, and my sense of self and art. Consequently, any further approaches to sense of space and place must help me understand and appreciate the substantial values in cultures and art.

Throughout this series, I sought to paint the spirit and vital rhythm of a place, but not imitating nature. There were attachments to places, transformed in my current paintings, which reflected the most sophisticated and complex value of the multi-layered colours of Australian society and the roles of the city of Melbourne. These roles, in expressing a sense of place, have influenced my art practice, and resulted in the series of my 'Melbourne' paintings. Leuthold (2011)

pointed that a sense of place “is part of the development of an integrated self as well as a source of a sense of belonging to a specific location” (p.179). From this perspective, these paintings embodied emotional and conceptual context and an ability to evoke collective experiences and feeling. They sought to express the phenomenon of multiculturalism, and incorporated elements that act as a metaphor for the ever-changing.

Nature has a place to play in creativity, as interpreted by Leuthold; he said "Ultimately, each culture's unique aesthetic expression has emerged from its profound relationship with nature." He additionally links this to the notion of a place; he noted “Our interactions with our environment are a major basis of the conceptual sense of place that was developed”(2011, p.183). In this context, a fundamental change took place in my thinking through progressing with my art to achieve a synthesis between over there and over here. This shifting opens a window upon the research questions and objective, which led to an appreciation of opportunity as dimensions of creativity.

The relational approach that I am taking involves a sense of place-based connection in response to Melbourne as a way of reconsidering identity and belonging, where there is a dynamic fusion of ideas. It addresses the impact of transnational societies in Australia and refers to multiculturalism and its influence as a formative resource. As Kevin Dunn pointed out “In Australia, this embrace of diversity has taken the form of multiculturalism, which adds another layer of national identity to earlier White Australian and assimilationist identity” cited by Noble (2009, p. 78). In reference to Dunn's perspective below, and following this chapter, I will demonstrate how my Melbourne paintings adopt the transnational mode and its attendant hybrid sense. These paintings were executed and seen to speak on behalf of a locality. They explore the articulation of debates surrounding art and identity, and highlight the visibility/invisibility of hybridity, multiculturalism and juxtaposition.

### **Symbolism and narrative through colour and texture**

As the title of this chapter suggests 'narrative in colour and texture', the conceptual dimension of experimenting with colour and texture as a language constitutes the framing metaphor for my consideration of the notion of place and space, identity and cultural significance for re-addressing belonging. The series of my artworks *Narrative in colour and texture* (2010 – 2013), transforms and translates the self-knowledge and concept, experimented with colour, technique and textural concern informed by indigenous sensuality. The choices related to subject matters, methods and content of the research study are based upon personal and cultural values. I investigate the art of other cultures in order to approach the evaluative dimension that this research has for my own art making process. I want my paintings to have the capacity to visualize an expression of universal values.

I recognize the significance of metaphor to convey psychic and artistic meaning. I have traced throughout this chapter, the use of metaphor of colours and texture produce 'narrative'. The profound tensions creating my 'Melbourne' paintings and achieving my 'Australian' palette raise questions about the potentialities and limitations that can constitute new artistic movement and create narrative<sup>25</sup> as that which colour and texture are the language of the stories. In this way, my "painterly-ness" the use of 'narrative in colour and texture', employs metaphorically and ambiguously as a language and method of my studio. As referring to my pictorial use, the language I employed has broken the boundaries between self and the 'community host'.

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<sup>25</sup> This narrative is about across cultures issues; ethnicity, identity, history, culture and art...etc. It is about visible and invisible things that have been felt and observed, and have to come through art form (painting).





Figure (30): Abumeis; 'Narrative in Colour and Texture' (2011)

As the narrative title of this chapter emerges, the conceptual dimension of colour and texture as a language constitutes the framing metaphor for my consideration of the research questions regarding the notion of space and places, identity and cultural significance as means for re-addressing belonging. Implicitly or explicitly, exploration is a kind of process which is more usually associated with words and text, it is perhaps appropriate in the case of integrating studio research such as the conceptual use of colour and texture that have accrued as the metaphor of my new palette. This approach may be interpreted as a kind of linguistic model and a narrative that invites a per-formative reading. As I noted in my statement for my solo show *Narrative in Colour and Texture* (2011),

‘The body of my work tells some kind of story, which I think it does, the story of a journey into Australian culture, and colour and texture is the language of the story.’ Abumeis M

My paintings are talking about themselves and everyone can read them independently and individually. The adoption of colour and technique of textural quality and its efficient potential serves the concept of painting as a lyrical metaphor of identity - history - migrant – boundaries and etc. And from the migrant perspective, to symbolise my state of mind and being as guest (foreigner), who becomes appreciative with his host.



Figure (31): Abumeis; 'Mat of ancestors' (2010)

My current art production and thought has resulted in a collection that explores the relationship between the discipline of art and research, and introduces the viewer/reader to the possible dynamic interface between philosophical reflections and art practices. Like some contemporary artists, I have been deeply influenced by indigenous cave paintings where there is such texture, value, and sophistication and refinement of images. I should mention here that the contact with indigenous art (the cave painting in the Libyan Desert) inspired my experimentations with texture. It has given me a great deal of pleasure reflecting on my growing awareness of the ancient human, art and heritage.

### **Transforming characteristics of Australian landscape through colour and texture**

Through this research project I am pursuing a very personal interest and observation which has accumulated since I have lost my stereotypes about Australia, and have been growing since my arrival in Melbourne. The investigation through this project explores geological features of the land's identity in order to incorporate motifs form and their conception. It created a popular and accessible language of the landscape which can reflect an image of Australian nature and landscape.



Figure (32): Abumeis; 'The land of red ochres' (2009)

The idea of finding subjects and pictorial method (texture and colour tones) lies in my own primary observations and the strength of impressions and stereotypes that I originally held in relation to Australia. In addition, my concern was in what way was it possible to utilize an indigenous art iconography in my art practice? Therefore, the paintings are intended to encourage a contemplation of the experience, to evoke land qualities and surfaces that suggest a space of ambiguity, mystery, history, and indigenous sensuality. For example, my paintings; *The Land of Red Ochres* (2009) - *Down Under: The Land of Red Ochres* (2010), *Talking to Local: Kangaroo Land* (2010), *Transnational Indigenous Earth* (2010) and *Yarra* (2012), bring a narrative voice to practice-led to research and my journey in Australia, engaging with pure pictorial issues. The narrative goes back to historical references and forward through the contemporary lived experience.





Figure (33): Abumeis; 'Down under: the land of red ochres' (2010)

The titles of the paintings are themselves loaded signifiers since I am referring to the land's geological features and characteristics, and the texture was added as a response to my concern over the quality and identity of Australian land and the sense of place and space in relation to surface. The painting *Talking to Local: Kangaroo Land* is an example that brings to the forefront the power of stereotypical images of Australian popular symbolism<sup>26</sup> and distinctive themes, by featuring aspects of domestic iconic fauna (Kangaroo). The scratching combined with various ochre tones of the outback offer divergent meanings, which may include historical, environmental and spiritual narratives. The adoption of richness in texture and earthly tones with the yellow and red ochre of native Australian vegetation, rocks, earth, and an essence of the Australian landscape would be followed by the geological features of landscape and as lyrical metaphor of identity - history – migrant and etc.

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<sup>26</sup> The sensuality of traditional Australian images of the simplicity fauna with the harsh landscape were the value that motivated me;  
*'I was inspired by the domestic Australian fauna (Kangaroo) and the identity of landscape; found in various aspects of its geological features, history, which carry perfect respect from indigenous peoples, as I want to pay my respects to that relationship, from context of locality'.*



Figure (34): Abumeis; 'Talking to local' (2010)

The deeper understanding of the significant value contacting with the indigenous art (cave painting) takes me back thousands of years past where some of my works have been refining of a new set of images based directly on figurative painting at Akakus<sup>27</sup> Mountain in the Libyan Desert. To me as an artist, land is sacred identity reference; the land where our ancestors lived contains our heritage, our history, and spirit. Much of my paintings are about the land, because it is so valued. For example, through my painting *Transnational*

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<sup>27</sup> The mountain of Akakus located in the centre of Libyan Sahara. It is considered a significant source and evidence for the flourishing civilizations based in that place and time represented in its ancient rock paintings.



*Indigenous Earth* (2010), I strongly admire the early paintings that were directly done on the land in the form of rock painting. I was motivated by returning to the very beginning of pre-historical indigenous cave paintings in order to reinterpret things in my own way.



Figure (35): Abumeis; 'Transnational Indigenous Earth' (2010)

How can I use indigenous sensibility and rock art iconography in my practice? Technically, I was beginning to feel that oil paint was not satisfactory for reaching a desired effect. Consequently, I began to experiment with a medium—modelling compound impasto for textural effect. The technique of using thickly textured impasto is to reinforce the creative intention of works which contain clues as to their influences and background. My intention of utilizing and revitalizing indigenous art and mythology is to develop a recognizable personal style, and to bring an appreciation to the past as a pair of the present in order to blend time and places.

My artwork *The Dreaming Ancestors* (2010) below (figure no: 36) with its metaphoric title and painterly method has taken me into the history space where the past is frozen, and needs to be revitalised; this reflection takes me back to thousands of years past. The painting considers the memory of our ancestors in

order to pay my profound respects to their relationship to nature, and invites viewers to generate their own response to the painting in a current contemporary manner.



Figure (36): Abumeis; 'The Dreaming Ancestors' (2010)

From my philosophical perspective and migrant context, the painting metaphorically may visualize the fact that we have never been able to choose our places of birth and our names, although, they have nevertheless become essential sub-themes formulating our constructive identification documents. However, in some ways we might be able to choose the place that we wish to live in and die, and through which we can conceptualize the notion of belonging.

Being inspired by John Brack's subject in his painting *The veil* (1952) (figure no: 37), my artwork entitled *The covered head painting* (2010) (figure no: 38) derives from the observation of the ongoing reconstruction and current diversity and contraction of Australian society. From a different angle, the painting

descends from the source of political and human context in relation to the current argumentative issues regarding Al-Hijab's 'Phobia'<sup>28</sup>.



Figure (37): John Brack; 'The Veil' (1952), oil on composition board, private collection, Melbourne

The iconic artwork is non-figurative painting; it featured one of materialistic motifs and open patterns, produced in the way to attract viewers' attention and inviting them for an intellectual reading. This visual imagery's meaning comes from the structure of knowledge and practice in which it is embedded; it conveys meaning through material and symbols, and carries a social message and pure intellectual rights. But not to mention here that it has to be engaged in a complex religious and ideological context or to any unnecessary encounter.

I only attempt to bring a brief speculative analysis and exploration of the possible approach from a migrant perspective. The inclusion of the material was both an intellectual response to humanitarian issues and considered necessary as a pictorial device as a means to increase the viewers awareness regarding the Al-Hijab issue. As for Bowen's strong theoretical view about this issue, he claimed

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<sup>28</sup> I should mention that this artwork is intended to be the first painting in a series related to the use of Al-Hijab in Western societies, and with its own "head cover"; it is a metaphor for my personal attitude to enhancing public visibility of the transnational issue of "head cover".



"In recent years, no single religious image has evoked as many conflicting ideas and emotions about gender as that of a Muslim woman wearing a headcovering."  
(2002, P.73)



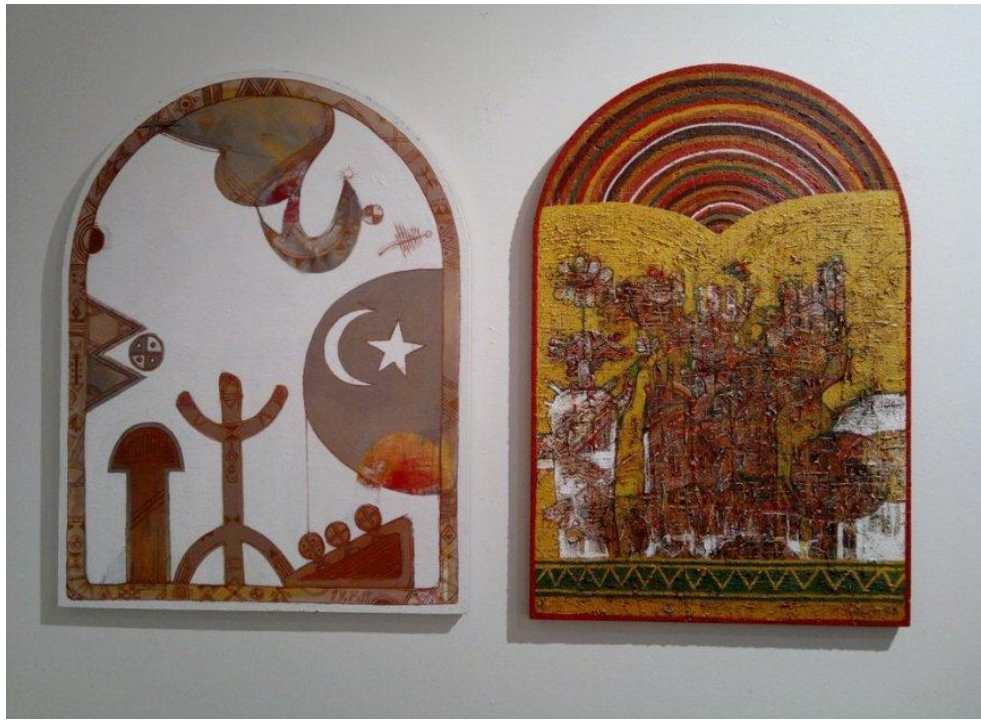
Figure (38): Abumeis; 'The covered head painting' (2010)

Referring to Bowen's comment, the painting suggests a reference to moral values and codes. It has manipulated pictorial codes in order to articulate significant cultural, political and moral commitments, and social and psychological relation to address the issue. This painting opens up interesting pathways for both exploration and interpretation of process, which has narrative voice and language, thereby putting us in a dominating position within which a new climate of ideas has brought with it a new sensibility.

Behind the head cover, the work seeks to portray a kind of minority in Australia; the lives of Muslim women in everyday commitment terms, and to avoid expressions that are poorly understood beyond religious, social, and political circles. The work metaphorically attempted to let the material speak, and to address issues that emerged from the material itself; the material pattern was employed in symbolism and ritual associated with the reproductive dialogue. The ritual significance here concerns the construction of Australian society, in particular the Muslim community as a minority which is a part of the Australian mosaic, not implying that it would carry any kind of a visual ideology or even contained sacredness. I briefly acknowledge that the strategy using this material form is a kind of gesture towards a new way of being today. I would probably need to say that viewers may have a much clearer reading of what the painting meant than I have ever arrived at myself.

### **Liberation as institutional participations and reconstruction of homeland solidarity**

Despite the manifestation of transnational intellectual zone and the space of liberation due to this research, some of my paintings can be read as a critique of my concerning with national identity; its continuity 'discipline' and melting. In instance, my paintings entitled *Revolutionary icon* and *Colour Leads Societies* (2011) reveal a sense of new certain political mobility and movement 'over there' my homeland. The title of the painting *Colour leads societies* was appropriated from the painting of the French painter Delacroix *Liberty Leads Societies* (1830). It featured what has been called 'The Spring of Arabic Revolutions', which in my homeland Libya was known as 'The February Revolution'.



Left - Figure (39): Abumeis; 'Revolutionary icons: identity continuity 'discipline' and melting' (2011)  
 Right - Figure (40): Abumeis: 'Colour leads societies' (2011)

The idea was to use symbols, icons and signs depicting meanings and interpreting things as codes to unfolding narratives. On reflection, my act of covering the Libyan Revolutions emerges with displaying the country flag-colours that are celebrated in my version of 'Liberty and Change'. My determined hold of my homeland flag was symbolic of my national identity. The combination of my national flag, flowers and the textured quality, with the organic indigenous colouration, seemed fitting given a revolutionary art and sense as metaphor of seeking for liberty, freedom and change<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> The consequence of transforming this 'liberation' through these paintings metaphorically can be seen as a wish for or stage of reconstruction and development of the national identity.

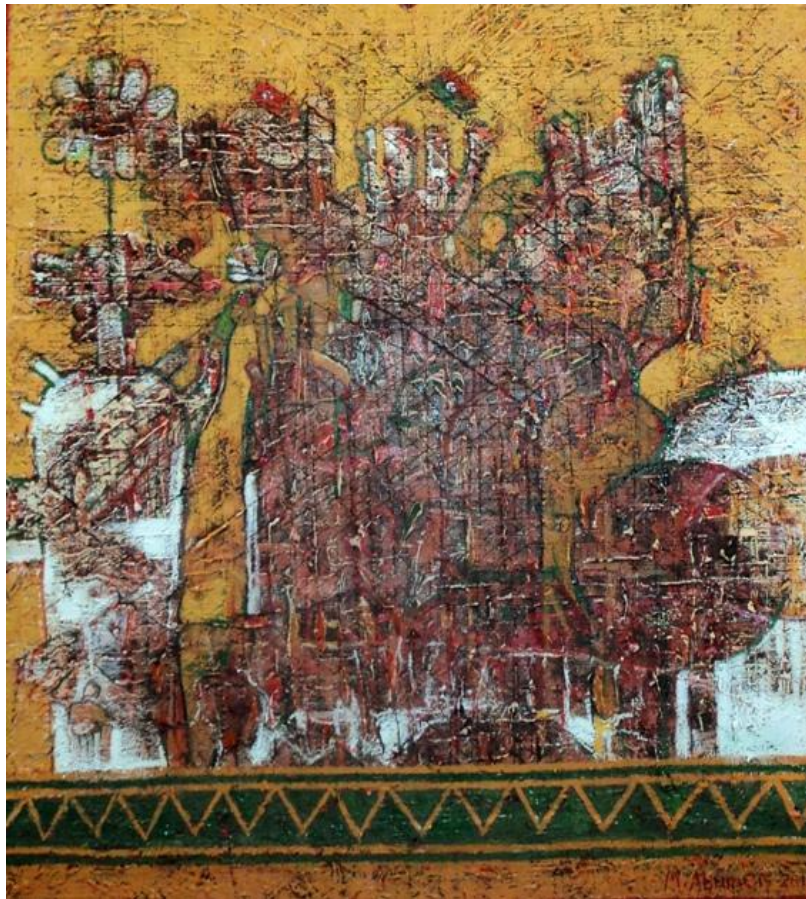


Figure (41): Abumeis; detail of 'Colour leads societies' (2011)

Obviously, there is no doubt that many of us somehow may have a sense of belonging to a particular national identity, and even some feel that they belong to a particular group, as has been shown by various minorities over the world. Thus, it seems to be there is a constant possibility of correspondence between art and nationalism.

### **Conclusion of Chapter Three**

The purpose of this project has been to explore, question and manifest a notion of what a transnational artistic identity is, or how one can be constructed or generated? It investigates a sense of new potentials for individual perspectives and presents the value of stylistic analysis for promoting cross-cultural understanding in art. A sense of identity is reinforced through the representation of my relationship to the physical surroundings and environment; this deed of representation as described by Leuthold “integrates psychological, spiritual, and social processes” (2011, p. 6). For instance, the impact of Australian influence; geography, history, culture and art upon my current artistic accomplishment held to be formative that has been called into the questions of the research.

It draws upon ideas and case studies from cultural and critical observation, history, philosophy, theory, aesthetics and studio integration. In my series of paintings entitled *Narrative in colour and texture* (2010-2012) displayed in this chapter, I represented an individual approach to studio integration; my "painterliness", the use of my 'narrative in colour and texture' employed metaphorically and ambiguously as a language and studio method.

‘The body of my work tells some kind of story, which I think it does, the story of my journey into Australian culture, and colour and texture are the language of the story’.<sup>30</sup> Abumeis M

It is in recognizing the significance of metaphor as that which can carry psychic and artistic meaning that I can reach different emotional, conceptual and theoretical frameworks based on my studio art. In this chapter both the physical and intellectual activities of the research are interpreted within an individual framework. The relationship between practicing in art and identity is analyzed, and the project positions that these relations are fluid, and never static. This significance is further explained in the following Project Four by linking the notion of place and space. This includes the continuing fascination with texture and colour themes that reached a climax for me in the city of Melbourne.

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<sup>30</sup> Referring to my pictorial use, the visual language I employed has broken the boundaries between self and the 'community host'.

# Chapter Four



## Chapter Four

### Project Four

#### ‘Sense of Place and Space’

##### Introduction

As the chapter title ‘Sense of place and space’ suggests, the importance of shifting meaning of this topic explores questions and manifests notions of what a sense of place is, or how it can be generated? This was my concern through conducting the questions and objectives of this research, and in order to sense new potentials for individuality to emerge within my art practice. This project engages with notions of place and space, and belonging, in the context of relevant literature and contemporary art. It is a reworking of concepts, theories, and terms from a wide range of established disciplines.

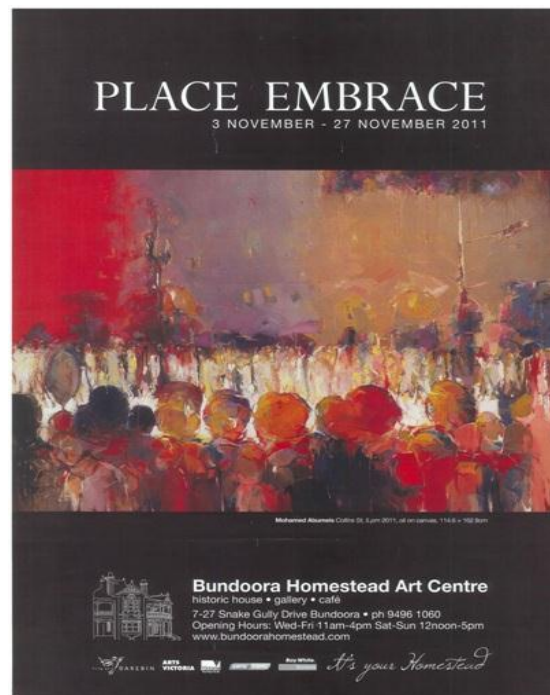


Figure (42): The poster of my solo exhibition ‘Place Embrace’ (2011)

##### Place embrace

As for my current issue, belonging to a new home in response to Melbourne, the works of Australian painter John Brack becomes an affective source for my project, reinforcing the way of finding subject matter and ideas in my immediate surroundings to make (paintings) which reference Melbourne. Relevant to this project, my solo exhibition under the title *Place Embrace* (November 2011 at Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Access Gallery – Melbourne), in part I focus

on instances where the relationship between my cultural legacy and the current contemporary experience of living in a metropolitan context related to local communities response to Melbourne, with long-established transnational art practice as a central issue. This exhibition forms a piece of research aimed at defining, illustrating and exemplifying the main parameters of transnational contemporary art practice, through painting. The manifestation of this contribution is part of the fact that cultural diversity has become one of the major icons of the global community space<sup>31</sup>.

The series of paintings displayed in this exhibition, are intended to highlight the dynamic nature of cultural exchange and the quality of visual expressions. Such work is generally exhibited with reference to cultural context that address an exchange made possible as the result of such multiculturalism. My aim is that the artworks will significantly contribute to the newly emerging conversation of contemporary artists and the exploration of trans-national identity in modern Australian society.

### **Melbourne as a transnational advocacy space and social and artistic movement: The roles of capitalism**

Australia is one of the most remarkable places on earth. It is remarkable for its unique geographic features and the land's identity and ecology, its history and its living culture. In particular, the cultural capital (Melbourne) as it has seen in by the stunning diversity of landscape, the standing cosmopolitan sympathetic architecture and stunning visual art tradition. And as I found it; Melbourne is a transnational advocacy space and place, cultural and artistic movement. In this sense, this project will explore the formation of transnational communities in Australia (Melbourne) as discourses and 'space' for transnational art practices - reconstructing identity and shifting meanings of 'home'. It attempts to find the possible characteristics of Australia (Melbourne), and offers them as effective sources that manipulate and liberate institutional participation and forms of art production.

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<sup>31</sup> Brah and Coombes. (2000, p. 5). *Hybridity and its discontents politics, science, culture*. Routledge. London and New York.





Figure (43): Abumeis; 'Transnational advocacy space and place: roles of capitalism (Melbourne city)' (2013)

The significance of connecting with places throughout the series of my paintings entitled *Place embrace* (2010 - 2013), for instance; *Transnational advocacy space and place: roles of capitalism (Melbourne) - Swanston St –Epping Train – At the Intersection of Swanston St and La Trobe St: Diversity, Vibration and Juxtaposition – Collins St, 5.pm - Yarra* and *Flinders St Station* (illustrated throughout this chapter), exposes and explores the critical roles played by the cultural capital, and multiculturalism of this city by providing a transnational mode and intercultural space for establishing creativity.

The paintings depict Melbourne as an exemplary place of multiculturalism and transnational communities. It is revealed as a transnational advocacy space for social and artistic movement. It is my new home and base for my temporary migration. By doing so, my paintings seek to play a part in enhancing and representing the value of Melbourne as a transnational city; the city which acts as a centrifugal force for transnationalism, drawing into itself value and energy, offering asylum to many a transnational migrant artist.

The paintings are experimentation into the life around me, the colours have been adopted to identify implicit elements of contemporary daily life in response to Melbourne, and therefore contain the clues which reinforce the idea of being a transnational artist in Melbourne. In this sense, viewed through the eyes of an immigrant, I feel that my colourful images of bustling Melbourne cityscapes represent a multi-layered construction of Australian contemporary society.

The colours in the paintings fuse and melt onto each other to reveal unity and acceptance, and thus an opportunity to find a place in this complex system. This case study refers to my experience ‘over here’ in Melbourne and has been literally transformed through the central figure of the image below, where I centre and represent myself among the colourful unfolding river of humans in Swanston street.



Figure (44): Abumeis; details of the painting ‘Swanston St’ (2011)

To draw too briefly on the theoretical position that I am taking involves a space and place or strategy of reconsidering identity and belonging. It addresses the sense and colour of a place and the impact of the evolution of my exile in

Australia. This 'embrace' of diversity, has taken the form of multiculturalism, which adds another layer to my national identity and art practice. Over all of this, a professional involvement reveals the manifestations of transnational communities in Australia as a 'space' for constructing new identities, practices and discourses.

### **The role of the city of 'Melbourne' in Modernism**

Historians located 'Modernism' in urban societies and culture emerged in the great capital cities like Paris, London, Berlin and New York, which were experiencing exponential growth both 'economically and demographically'. Consequently, a great number of distinguished modernists were influenced and exiled to these places in order to discover the world's great capital cities. For example, 'Picasso and Juan Gris (1887 - 1927) were Spaniards who went to live in France. The thinker T.S.Eliot, and the imagist poet. H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886 - 1961) left the United State to live in England" (Rodrigues & Garratt 2001, P. 94 - 103).

In domestic affairs and according to the art historian Professor Bernard Smith (2003) 'Australian art historians are in general agreement that what is still called in Australia the modern movement first began in Sydney, followed a little later, in Melbourne'. They argued 'The modern period in Australia covered the years from c.1920 to c.1960'<sup>32</sup>. This period of time featured some of greatest Australian artists among them Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Margret Preston, John Brack, the list is endless. Whereas, the movement of Australian contemporary art has begun in the 1960s, new experiences have come with the work of artists like Ricky Swallow, Howard Arkley, Juan Davila and Patricia Piccinini. The both movements explore the new concept of Australian identity. (Smith, 2003, p. Front cover page) However, Gerard Vaughan, director of the NGV, claimed,

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, Bernard 'commentary'. (2003, p. 86). Two Centuries of Australian Art, from the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Thames & Hudson Australia in association with the NGV- Melbourne.

“Melbourne has always been regarded as one of the greatest urban phenomena of the nineteenth century, and its key cultural institutions, which were founded in the 1850s and 1860s, reflected the ambitions of a new society made rich on the discovery of gold in 1851” Lane (2003, p.4).

And according to Smith “At mid-century Melbourne was the focus for the *Angry Penguins* group with Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker” giving new attitudes to art practice within the Australian context through the urgency of their artworks, and to their belief that modern art is the vehicle for a new local content. The greatest modernist Australian artists recognised the role of the city ‘Melbourne’ in Modernism, they were sure of the value of their exploratory artwork as being a fragment of a progressive unveiling of the spirit of the modern Australian age<sup>33</sup>. The artists built self-awareness out of being part of a new set of sensibilities, a new way of looking into the world.

Melbourne has drawn talented and creative artist and writers like a ‘magnet’. The city is about an attitude to modern life, and the very stuff of key modernist artists from the ‘avant-garde’<sup>34</sup> such as Nolan, Tucker, Perceval, Boyd, and Brack. Brack (1920-1999) reinforced his way of finding subject matter and ideas in his immediate surroundings. He observed and recorded in his paintings aspects of the life around him – response to Melbourne as the place where he grew up, and more importantly some of his paintings have made reference to Melbourne such as the painting *Collins St, 5p.m* (1955). According to the senior curator at the NGV Kirsty Grant “Brack acknowledged that the painting made reference to T.S.Eliot’s monumental ode to modern life, *The Waste Land*, 1922”, in particular, a passage from ‘The burial of the dead’:

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<sup>33</sup> Issues like identity formation and social diversity and of course post – colonialism are all very important subjects in Australian culture and art. As a result, Australian art is diverse and intersects with, and crosses into, other cultural forms. Migration and politics are also issues that have been addressed continuously by Australian artists.

<sup>34</sup> “The term avant-garde is often associated with modernism, they represent modernism’s project in its purest and most vibrant form” (Rodrigues and Garratt 2001, p. 112).

Unreal City,  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many  
I had not thought death had undone so many.  
Grant (2009, p. 97)

It is interesting to compare the modernist ideas of Brack with those of T.S. Eliot. The work is held up with Eliot's as the quintessence of the modernist spirit. (Rodrigues and Garratt 2001, p. 123) The crowd was a vital symbol of the constructed mass of urban humanity. It had a fundamental impact as occurred by its influence on the T.S.Eliot's passage from *The Waste Land*... "*Unreal city, under the brown fog of a winter dawn, a crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, I had not thought death had undone so many.*" Subsequently, the influence of this evocative passage and the city crowd of Melbourne both resulted the well-known masterpiece of John Brack *Collin Street at 5pm.*<sup>35</sup>

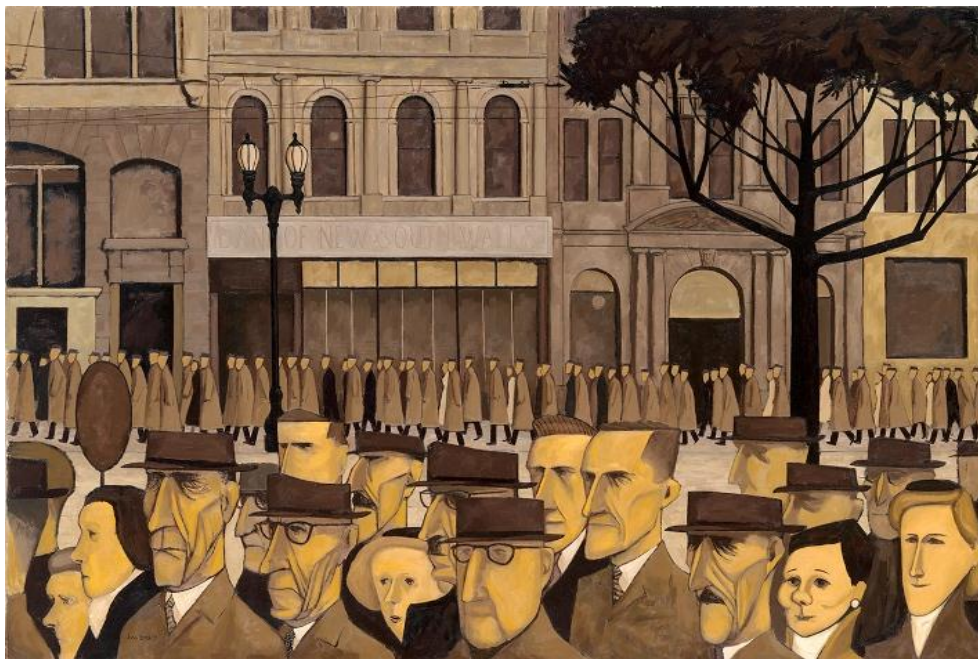


Figure (45): John Brack (Australia 1920-1999): *Collin St., 5p.m. 1955*, oil on canvas, 114.8 x 162.8 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Purchased, 1956

Throughout the painting, Brack created a utopian vision of the spirit of the age of Melbourne in the 1950s. The crowd adopts the movement of the human river which represents the very essence of the city of Melbourne's modernism. The

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<sup>35</sup> According to Smith the work *Collins St., 5p.m.* (1955) acquired by the NGV, has become one of Melbourne's most popular, urban icons. (Smith, 2003, p. 87)



fascination of city life derives from its surface narrative, the figurative, and the city centre; were such lyrical metaphors for urbanism. (Rodrigues & Garratt 2001, p. 96) Personally, it was a pleasure immersing myself in the world of some of the greatest of Australian modernist artists, to make contact with the traces of artistic movement in Australia.

### **Transforming place and space through painting**

The purpose of this project four has been to establish the need for understanding the roles of the sense of place and space in the cross - cultural analysis of art. Transforming place and time through painting is another way that my art reveals its collective meaning and metaphors for states of mind. The experience of a sense of place in this research is occurred and developed due to the interrelation of several elements; social life, language, culture, art, and views of nature.

Living in a city like Melbourne and the city's immediate surroundings, and being in touch with the works of some Australia's greatest artist, I felt I could give an insight to contemporary Australian society. The deeper understanding of the significant value accrued through engaging with the modernist Australian artist John Brack's work brings me back to the first principles toward the stage of modernism. I have utilised what I consider to be a key element of Australian modern art in order to find a useful way of using traditional symbols by employing them in dialogue with a context of contemporary art practice.

Following in the footsteps of Brack, I did a long and short – walk in Melbourne in order to investigate and explore the new atmospheres and ways of finding subject matter and ideas in my immediate surroundings to explore life around me and to make (paintings) which referenced Melbourne. Ford said “As the community developed, the immediate area became a frequent painting location. It offered subject material reflecting the artistic ideology” (2006, p. 25).

Taken literally Ford's theoretical statement, pre-figures my intention to evoke clues to the spirit of our 'contemporary' age, and highlights a fundamental change in our understanding of social dynamics. Following the footsteps of Brack (revisiting the locations he painted), introduced me not only to the

“visible” urbanism of the landscape but also the “invisible” Melbourne themes; sense of migration, diversity- multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. I found it inspiring using history to get a sense of this place and people that lived and live here. Going through this process certainly got me thinking about the final details that a painter like Brack noticed and the connections he made with the city; I came away feeling like embracing the places. The dynamic consequences of this relationship generated new appreciation and approaches to transformation of a place.

Taken literally, the influence of modernist thinker, T.S. Eliot from *The Wasteland*.... ‘We can connect /Everything with everything.’ by Ford ( 2006, p. 27), this idea I have quoted lead me to be close-up and in touch with John Brack’s work, and to made thoughtful connections by utilising and reinterpreting some of his work such as the well-known painting *Collins Street, 5.pm.*



Figure (46): Abumeis; ‘Collins Street, 5.pm’ (2010)

I reinterpreted this painting in my own way with the same title *Collins St, 5.pm* (2011). The analysis in the period of time (from 1955 to 2011) creates narrative in titles, and provides a basis for spotlighting the phenomenon of diversity and the changing nature of Australian identity's construction. This sense of places is

a conceptual framework which facilitates the recognition of the dynamism of national identities. The consequence of this approach acknowledges that the concept of belonging in a contemporary context demands an essential concern of relationship to places and spaces.

Brack's iconic work, *Collins St, at 5.pm* (1955) captured the anonymity of the city office worker. My development of a new form of subjectivity in the painting *Collins Street at 5.pm* (2011) is my way of reconstructing time and place, reenergising social spaces, and regenerating the dominant forms of modernism. If the painting is valued, it will not be because it reflected or entered into a dynamic relationship with a changing world in between (1955 – 2010), but perhaps because it offers itself as the ultimate response to the both its time and place, and revealed the role of the city in the present; the urban environment, crowd and diversity are continuous discourses for a contemporary artist.



Figure (47): John Brack; detail of 'Collins St, 5.pm' (1955)



Figure (48): Abumeis; detail of 'Collins St, 5.pm' (2010)

The body of my artworks displayed in this chapter, reveal the poetic quality of lightness and heaviness of colour, the emotional response can at the time be as powerful a metaphor as the articulated response and embrace of the place. I avoid the use of pictorial issue of the surface thickness which permits the colours



to fuse and melt with each other, and to reveal the unity and the multi-layered construction of Australian contemporary society based on multiculturalism. This epic of colour suggests a diversity, softness and fluidity; the broken boundaries of colours and lights invite questions and highlight the subject with its lyrical tones. The syntheses of light and dark colours results in an image full of movement and rhythm. The colours fellowship with its broken edges has captured the moment, and metaphorically reformulated the crowd of people that demonstrate the city. The crowd as chaotic exuberance, as depicted in my paintings and as explored by Rodrigues and Garratt, who argue,

“The city crowd was both an anonymous phenomenon in which the individual could hide, and the place where identity (crucially, at *Political* identity) could be invented. The crowd became a key image of the conflicting values associated with the modern urban environment.” (2001, p. 95)



Figure (49): Abumeis; 'Epping Train' (2010)    Figure (50): Abumeis; 'Swanston Street' (2010)

My artworks in a gestural manner suggest questions of what contributions can I make in response to our present place? And in each case the paintings open meaning metaphorically; the heroic quality of colouration seems to hold a vast content of clues. The paintings are more conceptual works than a representation of a particular place; the works experimented with the life around me, responding to the country, the city, and the university which warmly welcomed

me. All of this provides me with a basis for approaching a sense of speaking my voice out loud among the crowd in order to make this contribution response to my/our present place.



Figure (51): Brack; 'The Tram' (1952), private collection, Melbourne

The body of artworks embraced in this chapter provide an immediate connection to place, seek to highlight the possible themes that could be a dilemma in order to approach more clearly the perception of space and place within a transnational framework. The series of paintings discussed below provides example of such work which conveys a personal narrative, the paintings forcefully articulate my own response to the urban landscape that I have found myself in. My interest in colour continued to develop considerably, I realize that the preoccupation with the new palette has in fact developed the meaning of colours and the way of transforming self – knowledge.



Figure (52): Abumeis; 'Druids Cafe - Swanston St – Melbourne' (2012)

“Sometimes I believe that no colour has a meaning of its own....It has meaning that bring to it out of our own individual experience of it”. Ford (2006, p. 12)

A new intense palette was developed which achieves a particular emotion that enabled me to recall the discovering of meaning through paintings. It examined motifs, techniques and symbols to link the present with the past in order to integrate them both in a contemporary artistic synthesis based on a series of painting. The colourful palette reveals a kind of formalism and allusion paradoxically in the way that the competitive colours transform into dancing ‘dynamic’ patterns and shapes. The colourful arena provides available and ongoing space for acceptance and tolerance. The colourful contrast servers serves as metaphor to my response to Melbourne, its cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism based on twentieth-first century living.



Figure (53): Abumeis; ‘Yarra’ (2012)

Through my paintings I mused thoughtfully on the 'nature' of the new surroundings, geographical features and identity of the land, places and spaces as conceptual framework, and emotional complexity. My painting *Yarra* (2012) is an example which reveals my voice through my journey in Australia (Melbourne) as a metaphor for cultural observation related to locality. I relate the land qualities to pictorial codes as a means to articulate the subjectivity, multiplicity, history that intimately connect to locality.





Figure (54): Brack; 'Head of a woman' (1954), private collection, Melbourne.



Figure (55): Abumeis: 'Australian woman with a collective identity' 2010

It is with a feeling of great pleasure and anticipation that I take on my new role as a researcher and artistic specialist (painter) seeking to approach the dilemma not as a choice between the East and West or the North and South but as part of general context in which I pursue my individual artistic project in the context of contemporary art by taking historical and traditional forms, aspects of cultural expressions, colours from the environment and putting them together in new ways.

### **Approach to Multiculturalism**

Earlier in this chapter, I focused on the wave of Melbourne's modernism period, when its impact on artistic creation and scholarship about art was strongly evident for reconstructing identity toward transnationalism. Consequently, I consider the impact of the case studies, for instance, on the analysis of John Brack's artwork *Collins St, 5.pm* (1955), its challenge is to regenerate and post date social structure of Australian society. The manifestation of this contribution is part of the fact that cultural diversity has become one of the major elements of life in Melbourne city and its transnational communities.



Figure (56): Abumeis; 'Flinders St Station (as conceptual and metaphoric space of transnational community)' (2010)

As it has become possible to think of 'multiculturalism' as a metaphor for representing the construction of Australian society and its characters, so too was the series of my paintings relevant to this project *'Sense of place and space'* (2010 - 2012). From this perspective, this project considers multiculturalism as a framework for the cross - cultural analysis of art. As I describe it, enabling that multi-layered colour of the society to become subject to the vision of social construction and improvement.



Figure (57): Abumeis; 'At the Intersection of Swanston St and La Trobe St: Diversity, Vibration and Juxtaposition' (2012)

As stated earlier, my 'Melbourne' paintings provide an example of evoking the manifestations of multiculturalism; I have been concerned with rendering objects and form with colour, visual rhythm, poetic feeling through the use of a rich palette with symbolic colours and depth of feeling. My aim was to visualize the role of Melbourne city; the phenomena of multiculturalism, the city human river (crowd) and its multi-layered colours of people.

The painting which I entitled *Are they speaking English?* (2011), for example, evokes a connection and association which can permit me to interact-blend and bind with other and a community. It intends to reveal out fundamental manifestations and aspect of diversity and multicultural response to Melbourne. It depicts the very remarkable tendency that although most Australians are using the dominant language (English), some communities continue to practice their languages of origin including English. This intersection or compound creates a diverse tone and colour- articulation and texture - voice and accent which results in the emergence of this sort of hybrid 'mosaic'.





Figure (58): Abumeis; 'Are they speaking English?' (2011)

Through this painting I attempt to explore issues and psychic processes that impact one's identity and relationship with others. In doing so, the fantasy of this painting is that it enters language and linguistic articulation with its narrative in title, visual 'ideology' identification and sense of self. A sense of Australian mode has been made through collective identities and articulation which delivered by this painting and this impact as Brah and Coombes (2000) said on both 'conscious and unconscious level'. (p.99) From theoretical dimension, the multi-colour skin of the contraction of Australian society (migrants) that inform issues of hybridity, home, multiculturalism, identity and belonging are significantly explored in this painting. The complex arrangement of the shape of the painting, (featureless calligraphy), the colours and texture aims to depict and communicate the different dynamics of the diversity and the society involved in this local behaviour and issue.



Figure (59): Abumeis; 'The tree of migration and multiculturalism' (2011)

My paintings entitled; *Migration seasons* (2012) and *The tree of migration and multiculturalism* (2011) reveal a sense of migration, which can be view as a framework of asylum, hybridism, multiculturalism and transnationalism. One of the manifestations of this contribution is part of the fact that multiculturalism has become one the major icons of the transnational community space.



Figure (60): Abumeis; 'Migration seasons' (2012)

The relational approach that I am taking involves a space and place-based connections response to Melbourne, as a way or strategy of reconsidering identity and belonging. It addresses the sense and colour of the immediate surroundings, this 'embrace' of diversity has taken the form of multiculturalism, which adds another layer to my identity and art practice. Further to that would be to infer that the breadth and richness of Australian art have given expression to cultural meaning through various forms. Today contemporary visual culture in Australia articulates diversity and its possibilities with white and non – white artists, local and migrant artists working across a range of materials and art forms to represent the multicultural land.

Morgan (2008) expressed his consideration response to the surroundings and environmental issues, he stated "The Australian bush, a site of redemption in



Australian Art, is thereby transformed into a nightmare. My anger when I read about this crime incited me to depict the incident". (p. 123) Like Morgan, I have been inspired by the environmental issues. Such of my paintings entitled *The Black Saturday* (2009) and *The White Sunday of the Black Saturday* (2010) experimented with the new-life around me. They expressed my sympathy and solidarity with my new 'home' and people, depicting as they do the tragic events and unforgettable memory of the bushfires of 2009.



Left - Figure (61): Abumeis; 'The Black Saturday (Marysville)', (2009)

Right - Figure (62): Abumeis; 'The White Sunday of the Black Saturday' (2010)

The idea of the subject 'The Black Saturday' was found during my several visits and long walk that I made in the region (Marysville - Melbourne 2009 and 2010). Arising from deferent concept, the painting dates from my arrival in Australia (the year of Black Saturday) and records the starting point of my journey here, with a sense of narrative. And the year after I followed the same method. I revisited the region and produced the painting *The White Sunday of the Black Saturday* which emerged to transform the other side of the black Saturday, and as a metaphor for my/our wish to learn from that experience.



Figure (63): Marysville - Melbourne (2009)

The colour and texture along with the titles, became regular features, acting as a symbolic code, functioning as part of the narrative in much the same way as the subject matter of the paintings; the adoption of ivory black, white and red as a lyrical metaphor of local environmental issues and the incident itself. Ultimately, in doing so, the place of this a new 'home' intimately connected to environmental, local, cultural and political issues is transformed in the paintings.

### **Approach to 'transnationalism': the emergence of a transnational Art practice**

The whole picture of this research is that the dilemma and concept of identity and belonging are inter-related; my profound concern is the analysis of how such concepts are being reconfigured and reconstituted at the nexus, conflict or confrontation, with the dynamic approach to the use of "transnationalism" as a term. The importance of this shift is concerned to promote self-consciously and self-confident identity consistent with its new-found conviction that 'dynamism' can longer be a term that occur fluidity, re-productivity and re-constructivism. While in the process of doing so, I have developed a hybrid artistic sensibility<sup>36</sup>. The importance of this new artistic movement lies above all in the development of a new sense of self. This sense of self is achieved through the conviction that I am in control of this research study and my own destiny and challenge, wherein

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<sup>36</sup> Related to my 'Australian' palette and my 'Melbourne' paintings.

I have established an essential balance between internal and external activities, in contemporary context. (Brah & Coombes. 2000, p.221- 229)

Through this chapter I investigated shifting meaning of a home - related issues in migration in order to speak culturally, socially and individually as an artist. This did resolve my ambivalence concerning identity, which sought to speak for a collective experience. It is arguably the case that "The imposition of a 'collective identity' upon the immigrant experience did not fit with the various trajectories of social experience." Morgan (2008, p.42) Morgan's statement reinforces the purpose of conceptualizing 'transnationalism' in the context of migration. I follow this insight by focusing on a position of the displacement perspective as constructing a new sense of belonging and forging new way of representing identity as fluid, which can constantly be subjected to the reconstruction process.

My experience of displacement continues to change due to the increase of travel across international borders over ten years; from my homeland Libya to the UK then the USA and ultimately Australia. Through this journey I have experienced conflicting cultural experiences of living in cross-cultural spaces. For a decade following 2004 (since I left England), my art practice was characterized by a period of revising, filtering and rethinking. During this period the subject of my art turned towards 'nationalism', and as a consequence the art works I produced were a constructive ground for my current journey and this phase of my creative development.

This new position was made manifest as a resistance to the limitations of restrictions in nationalism. Through living in different cultures, my sense of place has manifest itself in intellectual engagement with the cultural, social and political concerns of each host community / country. I feel it is worth indicating that my children, the English born daughter - Libyan born son - and Australian born daughter were formalized as a sort of multicultural hybrid family in which significantly as formative construction that adopted this integration and juxtaposition, and approaches a transnational identity. My artistic identity as displaced artist has been formulated by vital themes; African, European, American and Australian modes refer to my life and practice through art

experiences into these places. As a consequence, new approaches to the sense of a place and 'transnationalism' were achieved through the crossing boundaries and juxtaposition of these images. This ongoing reconstruction process of my artistic identity is grounded in a set of objectives which formulates a theoretical and individual approach to the notion of place and shifting meaning of 'home'.



Figure (64): Abumeis; 'The story across- intercultural spaces' (2011)

In a contemporary context, the perception of a transnational art community's roles is energizing us by providing a space from which to speak up, and to think in a loud voice. Professionally, it is providing a position of authority and a source of legitimacy; this has been the case for many transnational artists, including myself. For example, the emergence of transnational communities here in Melbourne refer to multiculturalism, provide me with an opportunity to approach my concerns and establish my own personal perspective to produce new ways of belonging and representing this transnational mode. As a consequence, this thesis presents a moderate accomplishment that relates to my lived experience, artistic movement and identity. Ultimately, the core of the emergence of transnational mind, culture and art practice has to be formulated due to its relation to a place and space. Whereas, the notion of a place and space are conceptualized to be related to my/our sense of how my/our world (visible and invisible surroundings) itself is ordered.

#### **Conclusion of chapter Four**

This chapter addresses the central issue of how to theorize the sense of place, as well as the question of the city's roles on the emergence of multiculturalism. Its outcome indicates that migration and multiculturalism have ever been part of the Australian global mindset. Subsequently, it would highlight that being part of Australia's cultural capital, offers my artistic passion great pleasure to engage

with the city (Melbourne) sub-themes, environment and surroundings, as long as the city opens its gate for cultural expressions based on multiculturalism, and as far as we appreciate that. As for my current issue, belonging to new home response to Melbourne, the artwork of Australian modernist painter John Brack becomes an affective source for my project, reinforcing the idea of being as transnational artist in Melbourne, and the way of finding subject matter and ideas in my immediate surroundings to make paintings reference to Melbourne.

It could be concluded that the shifting meaning of belonging demands an essential concern of relationship to place and space in order to more closely approach the perception of the reconstruction of identity within a transnational framework. And from a migrant perspective, to address issues regarding the notion and concept of the new 'home'. I explored my own experience of shifting meanings of home by exploring the effects of the rupture of leaving my 'home' in homeland. My dominant concern was to analyze the effect of the dynamic of variables and surroundings that play their roles on the reformation of my identity.

Form my studio investigation; the intercultural perspective facilitates an engagement with transnational dialogue, which derived from personal experience of Australia and being in the cultural capital - Melbourne. In doing so, my solo exhibitions held in Australia under the titles; *Place embrace –In between over here and over there - Narrative in colour and texture - and Alienation & The Scent of Memory*, are the culmination of both my theoretical and studio based approach to painting. They feature my concerns regarding perceptions of place, space and approach to belonging and transnational art practice.

# Chapter Five

# Chapter Five

## Conclusion

### Introduction

This concluding chapter summarizes the findings of each chapter, the research reflection, final thoughts, and the recommendations for future research projects are also discussed here. I will provide a brief overview of my exegesis in order to conduct and demonstrate my research's questions, aims and content. Then, I will show how my research integrated with studio practice has developed. Finally, my conclusion will outline the possibility of the emergence of my contribution to Australian and world contemporary societies and arts.

### Brief Overview

This thesis is designed to meet the needs of professional development and art practice. It reflects the structure of its subject, seeks to apply theories and methods to the study of topical choice, reworking of concepts, theories, and terms from a wide range of established disciplines. The chapters – centred exegesis are related to each other, as well as to the more general ones. The project, then, has two main aims, both closely connected. The first is to introduce the reader to the results of contemporary research into the ‘dilemma’ of a national identity and the construction of a transnational identity together with theories that seek to explain it. The second is to approach with appropriate methods of study, and investigation that can be possibly apply to one’s everyday experiencing and practicing, and transformation as a carriers keys terms. For instance, the sense of a place it is in this discussion that engages, in this project.

This research draws upon ideas and the case studies from cultural and critical observation, art history, philosophy, theory, aesthetics and integrating studio painting. This is a research project with its outcome due to an honest searching journey in Australia with an eye on visual transformations offered by lived experiences, cultural and geographic influence. Through this engagement with its emotional transformations, the research places these themes within a framework of dynamic approaches to transnationalism and the complex of belonging. In order to address the question of in what way can I establish my



own individual perspective, metaphorical and conceptual framework to enable me to reconstruct my artistic identity within a transnational framework? I turned to my analysis of the notion of 'home' to reconstruct and redefine my identity and sense of place within the shifting parameters of our contemporary world in relation to new variables. In this sense, my art production constituted and exposed an expression of a new approach to belonging and reconstructing new ways in which my identity might confront 'Nationalism'. This new position was manifest as resistance to the limitations and restrictions of nationalism.

This project provides an introduction to aesthetic concepts, expanding the discussion by reworking theories and transforming Australian influences. The topic brings up both contemporary and historical sources and examples, incorporating a case study cross intercultural spaces in between 'over here' Australia and 'over there' Libya. The content of this project addresses intercultural issues in art, a sense of place, space, time, identity and belonging, art and social order, considering these themes as constructions that formulate our understanding of art as practice-lead research.

Through this project I have sought to pursue the quest for understanding. What messages are conveyed by exhibiting a cross-cultural space? Does expressing a sense of place and space send a challenge to dominant ideas of approaching sense of belonging? These questions, and the controversies and fluidity around them, turn on how lived experiences interpret the practices individually, from crossing over boundaries to reconstructing notions and conceptions. The endeavour of understanding the issues involved, invokes a brief background about the complex construction of a national identity and social and cultural meaning attached to the objects and physical action in the questions, and over all about the interests and value of way I engaged myself as a researcher and my art practice as painter in these debates. Thus, I came to conclude that certain events and mobility of my lived experiences have had the strongest influence and impact on my art practice.

The purpose of research has been to transform my lived experiences in Australia in order to identify and shed light on several specific factors and open answers

that related to the specific research questions of this study. Firstly, I consider the dilemma of national identity "Nationalism" is an important term to begin with in order to constitute a ground floor to the study area and as the foundation of a new formalism. Furthermore, it claims new approaches regarding the controversial perception of understanding art and an artistic identity in relation to 'Nationalism', and thus takes the topic of the exegesis forward to that.

Secondly, the project is a thought evoking exhibition, in that it addresses the contentious issue of 'hybridity' - the issue of reconstructing identity centering my art practice on the imagery of blinding the boundaries in between 'over there' and 'over here' (Libya & Australia), and the expanse of these boundaries. In doing so, I sought to put viewers into the departure and arrival point of this transformative institutional journey. The idea of my journey in Australia is explored from different angles, through painting.

Thirdly, I sought to speak an individual voice, whilst also exploring critical thought and growing awareness through my painting. As a simultaneously as a response and challenge to the new variables resulting from changing 'home', and the inevitable transnational shifting of meanings inherent in that move from one culture to another. My own awareness of conducting my research questions and approaching a 'transnational identity', including inventing a hybrid art, were brought about by having lived in between over here and over there. In doing so, this research presents a modest accomplishment that resulted from the cross-cultural spaces, and the integration of boundaries relevant to my lived inexperience.

I then explore the critical roles played by capitalism and multiculturalism in providing intercultural spaces and establishing a transnational communities and art practices. Finally, I outline the ways in which my personal lived experience that dealing with a place and space as conceptual framework has impacted upon my studio practice, artistic identity and belonging as a transnational artist. In whole picture of this research the concept of identity and belonging are inter-related. In particular my profound concern is the analysis of how such concepts

are being reconfigured and reconstituted at the conflict or confrontation with the dynamic use and approach of the term 'transnationalism'.

### **The dilemma of national identity**

The research shares certain features with the ongoing debates on the dilemma of nationalist identity. Several interesting approaches emerged; I have given the question of identity a great deal of thought over the years practicing in art. I keep arriving at fluid unstable open answers. I claim that the circumstances and variables take a form of 'dynamism' having a constant impact on our cultural, social and political attitude. This thesis brings us to two of the central themes of this journey, the unexpected and contingent results of lived experience and the fact that I am not inevitably contained, as Brah and Coombes have said 'by that which seek to produce us as bounded subjects.' (2000 p.14) A dominant concern in terms of identity reconstruction, integration and approach to transnationalism has driven the research questions. For instance, the emphasis led to the introduction of the dilemma of national identity, which was employed to open a platform that permitted me to travel beyond nationalism and positioned the value of the case study of this research.

### **'Nationalism' as Constructive Term**

I became aware of the problem inherent in the use of 'Nationalism' as a term, which can be a complex problem in a theoretical framework. It could possibly destroy an identification that we have difficulty with. It can also accrue a negative impact on sources of knowledge and feeling, in relation to perception of belonging. Above all, it can possibly lead to 'living on edges'. However, there is no doubt that many of us may have a sense of belonging to a particular national identity, and some even feel that they belong to a particular group, as has been shown by various minorities the world over. In so doing, considered that there seems to be a constant possibility of correspondence between art and nationalism.

### **Changing home and approaches to migration**

Throughout this thesis (in words and painting) I have used my journey in Australia as a case study for two reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on how and why

some artists from different cultural backgrounds, including myself, may conceptualize and integrate places. Secondly, I ask, in what ways can such artists work with culture and artistic order at both the local and global levels? Unsurprisingly, cultural conflict can often be linked to questions of identity. This investigation has brought new knowledge to the idea of the “changing home” as it has to the characteristics of being a transnational artist.

### **Forging boundaries through my ‘Melbourne’ paintings**

My ‘Melbourne’ paintings visualize my own voice and my own personal narratives. They reveal my reflexive thoughts about the challenges I have encountered within this research process. Implicitly or explicitly, the integration of studio practice is a key component of the discourse with which I have engaged. A fundamental concern has dealt with my fragmentation of identity and with the forging of boundaries. I have asked the (research) questions “Can we ever leave home?” And if so, “Can we escape from the past?” In tandem with this question, “What importance should we give to our new home?” And, “Can we develop new achievements in our new home?” My conclusion is that in synthesising “old home” with “new home” there are no boundaries to the power of crossing over at that point where art and research meet.

This research has drawn on ideas of “reconstruction” which itself grows out of concepts of diaspora and hybridity – what Stuart Hall calls a “borderline condition” out of which “a multiplicity of identities” can be adopted (Braha & Coombes 2000 p. 252). In paint, one of the outcomes of this research has been my new “Australian palette”, as seen in my series of ‘Melbourne’ paintings.

Colour, content, and texture, technically and conceptually, play significant roles as a means to bring space, place, movement, time, and even objects into my painting.

In its totality, the body of my work tells a story. It is the story of my journey into Australian culture. Colour, content, and texture are the language of the story.

Within my ‘Melbourne’ paintings, places, spaces, external landscape, tangible and intangible objects, and sensations, all these are internalized and they reconstitute my identity, forming my own sense of relationship to the external

world, and my sense of self and of art. The artworks comment on social values, culture, politics, and art activity. I employed iconic images of other artists and utilized historical events. I regenerated images from the past as a vehicle for exploring the role of spaces and places in contemporary artistic society. I literally and conceptually drew my way into the experience of my everyday surroundings and the place I inhabited or visited.

The significance of connecting with places, in instances, throughout the development of my 'Melbourne' paintings reveals a kind of manifestation of the multilayered nature of Australian contemporary society. One example concerns John Brack's iconic work '*Collins St, 5pm*' (1955), which has been one of the key paintings in this investigation. I interpreted this painting in my own way and titled it '*Collins St, 5pm*' (2011). By doing this I aimed at analysing the way Australian society has changed between these two dates and I tried to spotlight the phenomenon of diversity and the changing nature of the cultural construct that is Australian society. This sense of place, spread across six decades, is a conceptual framework that allows recognition of the dynamism of national identities.

### **Approaches to the perception of a place and space**

From the theoretical references that informed my project, I have concluded that from a migrant perspective this research draws on the meaning of belonging in a contemporary context. It demands an essential concern of relationships to a place and space in order to address issues regarding the notion and concept of a new home within a transnational framework. Again, from the migrant perspective, "reconstruction identity", appears located in a certain mobility that encompasses dynamism, migration, integration, and all the consequences and outcomes of hybridity.

The solo exhibitions that I have held in Australia have been under the titles:

- In between 'over here' and 'over there'
- Place Embrace
- Narrative in Colour and Texture
- Alienation and the Scent of Memory

They represent the culmination of both my theoretical and studio based approach to painting. They feature my concerns about the perceptions of a place, space and approach to belonging. They dominate culture and artistic order - at the local and global levels.

### **Cross - cultural understanding and the emergence of transnational art practice:**

The key elements of a culture can be understood through its arts. The experience of boundary conditions, such as social and political space, from a migrant perspective, allows an exploration of the expectations and aspirations which inform and drive societies. It also recognises the structural conditions which frame a transnational artistic and cultural practice. From my perspective, it is a relief to practice art in this way and have a life that can be more fluid and mobile. I do not feel constrained as an artist. According to Brah and Coombes, quoting Treacher, this approach “lies alongside the wish to be there, to return and above all that I had never left.” (2000 p. 104) By experiencing such relief, I have witnessed what is termed 'juxtaposition' conditions in transnational communities with multilayered and collective identities and cultural backgrounds. This perspective was central to my attitude of understanding the inferences of transnationalism and artistic identity.

### **Final Thoughts:**

This thesis represents an effort at bringing together the broken boundaries and cross-cultural themes, through art (painting) and under one cover (in text). The outcome of this engagement has shed light on the methods and materials I have used. I have identified the key areas of the field and the contributions made to the field of theory and art. I have attempted to define the path to new knowledge. And I have conceptualized my way of being 'at home' within my chosen field of practice as an artist. I think that art is a place where I expected to come home to myself, but its challenge is always that it creates questions about identity rather than resolving them. I will build on this in future projects.

This exegesis does not pretend to be comprehensive, although in this work it has been possible to represent a range of artistic trends and developments. It



provides a modest opportunity for an audience to view my contemporary painting, the work of a Libyan artist, as a construction of identity and in response to Melbourne. So, it is my hope that this thesis, in its totality, will contribute to knowledge, to an increased dialogue between cross-cultural spaces, and demonstrate the role that art plays in this practical and theoretical conversation.

I would note here that, this thesis does not present itself as a socio-anthropological study, or as narrow definitions of such terms. It simply attempts to bring up a cross - cultural transformation in the form of paintings. These carry ongoing narratives and histories of the time I've lived in Melbourne and as my response to Australia. Many of the results of this research were not anticipated by me, and this unexpectedness has brought a welcome complexity to the overall investigation. It is a portrait set within a very personal framework which I hope others can identify

Although, my experience of life and of art practice in Australia led me in an entirely different direction from my contemporaries, I have my own story to tell: how my dreams and aspirations were never shattered, how I had to recover my confidence in myself, my identity as a human being, and as a transnational artist. How layers of my former culture played an important role in my recovery, as I looked for a new direction and language which could restore my cultural and artistic identity.

Finally, it is my hope that this effort will, in its own humble way, make a productive contribution to the ongoing debates about cultural diversity, hybridity, multiculturalism, and transnational art practice, cross-cultural dialogue, and international mobility and art.

## **Plates / List of Illustrations**

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- 2** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Identity construction themes 2* (2009), oil on board, 30 x 15 cm each.
- 3** - Mohamed Abumeis: *The Blue Man* (2004), oil on board, 35 x 55 cm.
- 4** - Mohamed Abumeis: *For brighter days to come* (2008), acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.
- 5** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Thinking in loudly voice* (2008), acrylic on canvas 100 x 100 cm.
- 6** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Icons Juxtaposition* (2004), acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.
- 7** - Mohamed Abumeis: *The crescent moon* (2004), Acrylic on canvas, 110 x 100 cm.
- 8** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Vibration of national identity 1* (2004), acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100cm.
- 9** - Mohames Abumeis: *Vibration of national identity 2* (2004), acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100cm.
- 10** - Mohamed Abumeis: *In between 'over here' and 'over there' 1* (2010), oil on canvas, 120 x 80 cm.
- 11** - Mohamed Abumeis: *When I was here I want to be there... and vice versa* (2009), acrylic on paper, 35 x 50 cm.
- 12** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Shifting meanings across boundaries* (2011), oil on board, 40 x 40 cm.
- 13** - Mohamed Abumeis: *In between 'over here' and 'over there' 2* (2010), oil on canvas, 150 x 100 cm.
- 14** - Mohamed Abumeis: *From over there* (2009), oil on board, 35 x 35 cm.
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- 18** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Fertility season* (2009) acrylic on canvas, 120 x 100 cm.
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- 21** - Mohamed Abumeis: *The scent of memory in exile* (2011), oil on board, 90 x 60 cm.
- 22** - The poster of my solo show *Narrative in colour and texture* (2012),
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- 24** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Progressing with texture* (2010), oil on board, 50 x 40 cm.
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- 26**- Mohamed Abumeis: *Reflection of Australian influence 1* (2010), oil on board, 60 x 50 cm.
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- 30** - Mohamed Abumeis: *Narrative in colour and texture* (2011), oil on board, 50 x 40 cm.
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- 37-** John Brack: *The veil* (1952), oil on composition board, private collection, Melbourne.
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- 64** - Mohamed Abumeis: *The story across- intercultural spaces* (2011), oil on board, 35x50 cm each.

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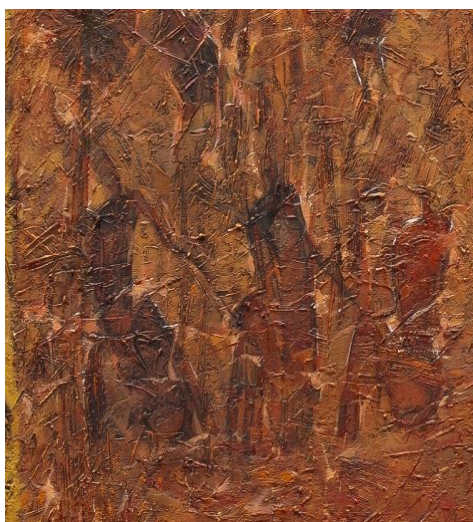
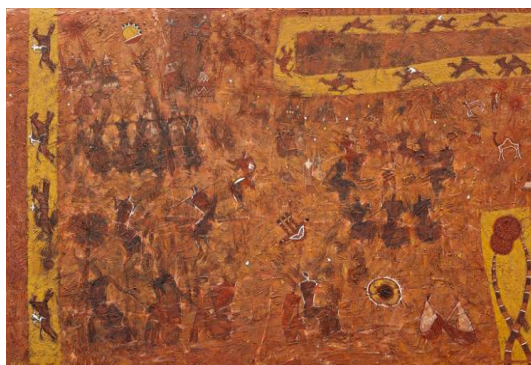
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## Appendix

### Documentation of Project

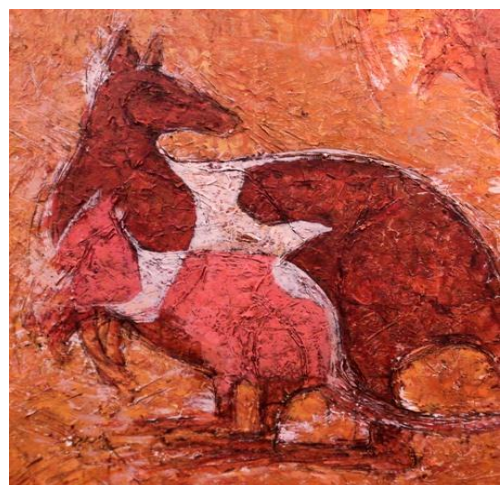


*Transnational indigenous land: 110x150 cm oil (2010)*





*The Dreaming Ancestors* (2010), mixed medium, 60x60cm



*Talking to local* (2010), mixed medium on canvas, 150 x 150 cm





Progressing with texture (2010) , 40x55 cm.





*Australian mosquito* 60x80 cm oil (2009)



*Swim in the ocean* 60x80 cm oil (2009)



Indigenous women on the Epping tram! 25 x35 cm (2010)  
The code of texture 30 x40 cm (2010).



*My neighbour's dog* 35x50 cm (2010)



Flinders St Station: 90x120 cm oil (2010)





*Collins St. 5p.m* (2011), 114.6 x 162.9cm, Oil on canvas



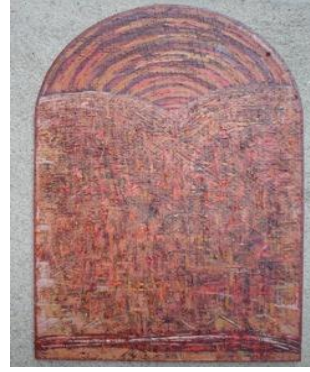
*Eppin Train* (2011), 100 x 120cm, oil on canvas

*Swanston Street* (2011), 100 x 120cm, oil on canvas

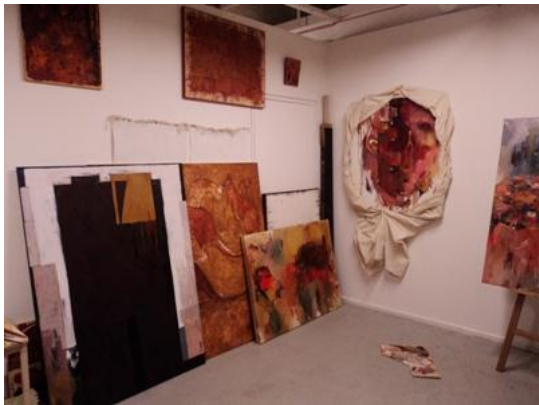




*Druids cafe - Swanston Street* (2012) 50 x 70 cm, oil on canvas








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### Mohamed Abumeis: Libyan's life is a work of art

BY MEAGAN WEYMES  
21 Nov., 2011 10:40 AM



SIPPING a short black coffee inside the grand Bundoora Homestead, Mohamed Abumeis points to his clothing with a cheeky grin. Wearing an Arabic-style traditional vest, thick glasses and blue jeans, the painter carries a bit of each country he's lived in, from his home in Libya to the UK, US and now Australia.

Abumeis came to Melbourne in 2009 with a scholarship to study his doctorate at RMIT. Softly spoken, with a thick Libyan accent, the Reservoir local says the experience of being a foreigner in Australia was an inspiration for his exhibition, Place Embrace.

"People expect you to work a certain way based on your background as a fine art student from Libya, but I wouldn't want anybody to put me in a box," he says.

Abumeis was one of the first Libyan fine art students to study in Australia, arriving two months after Black Saturday. The fires inspired several paintings based on trips to Marysville, including one finished a year after the fires with the title The White Sunday of the Black Saturday.

"There is always a little tiny hope after darkness, so we should be optimistic people rather than just learn from the lessons of that day," he says.

Another inspiration for Place Embrace is the revolution in Libya and the Arab Spring. When fighting broke out in Libya, sponsorship from the Libyan government for scholarships to study in Australia was cut, but Abumeis says he's lucky to have been supported by both RMIT and his home university. One of the challenges of studying in Australia was being so far from home during such a turbulent time.

"I felt I have no way to be back home to fight with my people ... so through my work it was a way to be with my people in this crucial time from my heart."


While Abumeis says he will return to help "make a new history" in Libya, he adds that his 2½ years in Australia have been overwhelmingly positive.

"I felt it was straight away like my new home and I've never felt that I'm a foreigner here."

The style and colours used in the paintings in Place Embrace differ based on his journeys in Australia. Abumeis refers to this as his "Australian palette", moving from a few earthy colours to a range of brighter colours.

"Melbourne is the ideal place for juxtaposition, the way people link the old with the new. It's warm [and] welcome and a great place for multiculturalism, acceptance and tolerance."

**Place Embrace is on at Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, 7-27 Snake Gully Drive, Bundoora, until November 27.**





Mohamed Abumeis.



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**DFA Seminar 2011**

**SHARMIZA ABU HASSAN** *Voyaging her mind and my myth*  
**MOHAMED ABUMEIS** *In between 'over here' and 'over there'*  
**OHM PATTANACHOTI** *Searching for self-awareness no. 11*  
**YIFANG LU** *The domesticated animal*

Opening Thursday 19 May 5-7PM  
 Exhibition Friday 20 May 10AM-5PM

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## Works-in-Progress

DFA Candidates

Sharmiza Abu Hassan (Malaysia)

Mohamed Abumeis (Libya)

Xiao Yu Bai (Australia)

Naoko Yehenara (Australia)

Ohm Pattanachoti (Thailand)

Ernesto Rios (Mexico)

Have great pleasure in inviting you to their exhibition  
 of work for the Doctoral seminars 2009

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm Thursday 15 October 2009

School of Art Gallery  
 RMIT University City Campus  
 Building 2 Level B  
 Bowen Street (off Latrobe St)  
 Melbourne, Victoria 3000  
 Australia

Exhibition dates: Thurs 15 & Fri 16 October 10:00 am – 5:00 pm









17- 21 August 2011

ON THE PERIPHERY  
ECKERSLEY'S OPEN ART SPACE GALLERY

**ARTISTS:**  
**YIFANG LU**  
**OHM PATTANACHOTI**  
**MOHAMED ABUMEIS**  
**ERNESTO RIOS**  
**SHARMIZA ABU HASSAN**  
**PAUL KELLER**  
**ACE WAGSTAFF**  
**SAMIRA GHASEMPOUR**

**OPENING NIGHT**  
**6PM - 8PM**  
**WEDNESDAY**  
**17 AUGUST 2011**

On the Periphery is an exhibition that brings together a group of RMIT Phd, Doctorate and Masters of Fine Art students who explore the notion of existing on the fringe of society and its ideals. From desolate landscapes depicting the hinterland of suburbia to images and installations exploring cross-cultural concepts, the artworks in this exhibition encompass a range of media including painting, photography, sculpture and installation.

**Yifang Lu's** paintings of abandoned RSPCA dogs create empathy in their viewer, as each dog with its own personality, looks at the viewer for comfort. They long for acceptance by society, and wait patiently for an owner to liberate them from their imminent fate. Yifang's deviation from canvas to perspex invites the viewer to engage more interactively with her paintings, as the viewer is able to see their own reflection in the Perspex wall paintings and walk around the two dimensional forms that stand freely in the exhibition space.

Through a combination of painting, drawing, digital and mixed media **Ohm Pattanachotti's** work is an investigation of the complexities of his spiritual background as a Thai Buddhist and his recent conversion to Christianity. His work incorporates both narrative and symbolism related to Buddhism and Christianity through their use of colour, pictorial structure and content, along with personal iconography.

**Sharmiza Haasan** explores the concept of the shield being used as a type of personal armour, from pre-historic times through to the present day. Her shield installation is a metaphor for her own armour, protecting her identity as a Malay woman and allowing her to maintain her customs and beliefs within western society.

**Samira Ghasempour's** photographs capture moments in time; a snap shot from a car window while driving through the countryside or an image of her children playing in a park. Each image, however, communicates a sense of detachment from the culture which they portray, as they are photographs taken by the outsider, the tourist.

**Paul Keller's** paintings of desolate landscapes on the hinterland of suburbia portray notions of isolation. The monotonous dark landscape, scattered with the occasional sign of life, being a street sign or a deserted road, in contrast with the dramatic skyline creates an otherworldly aspect in his paintings.

**Ace Wagstaff's** installations stem from multiple blunt edges of disparate sources, such as studies of cognition and art theory, music and psychology, internet culture and physics. By incorporating information from the boundaries of differing or contradicting ideologies, his work blurs the barriers between these sources.

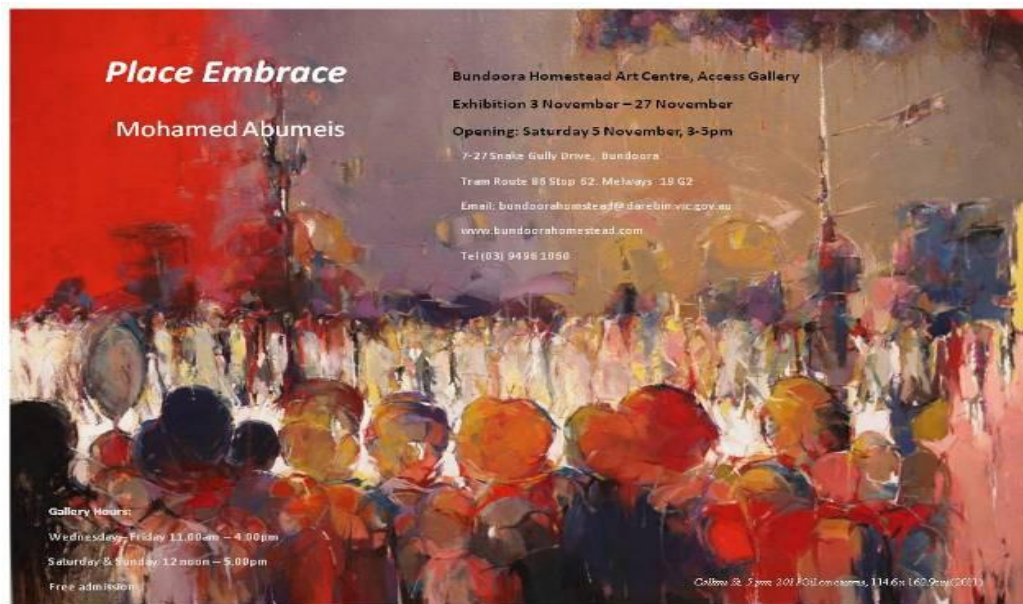
**Ernesto Rios's** artwork 'Yarra' is a collaborative, audio-visual work that explores the concept of drifting in the culturally diverse City of Yarra. Rios has collaborated with seven artists who have walked the City at different locations, documenting their wanderings through text, sound or video. These recordings are represented in multiple interactive selections laid over maps of the area and marked with the trajectory of the walks. The viewer is invited to participate in this work and experience the multiple artistic interpretations of identity within the metropolitan Kaleidoscope.

Viewed through the eyes of an immigrant, **Mohamed Abumelis'** colourful images of bustling Melbourne cityscapes represent a multi-layered construction of Australian contemporary society. The colours in the painting fuse and melt onto each other to reveal unity and acceptance, and thus an opportunity to find a place in this complex system.

This exhibition opens on 17 August at 6pm and runs until 21 August. Don't miss this exciting and stimulating exhibition which offers a diverse range of artworks and new media.

**ECKERSLEY'S OPEN SPACE GALLERY**  
**97 FRANKLIN STREET MELBOURNE**  
**17- 21ST AUGUST 2011**

**GALLERY HOURS: WEEKDAYS 9 - 6PM, SATURDAY 11 - 5PM, SUNDAY 10 - 4PM**



## Narrative in Colour & Texture



*Sensuality* Acrylic on canvas 103x94cm

An exhibition of paintings by  
**Mohamed Abumeis**

Tuesday 17 Jan. - Sunday 19 Feb. 2012

Opening Friday 20 Jan. 6 – 8 pm

Art at St. Francis' Pastoral Centre  
326 Lonsdale St – Melbourne

Opening Hours: Mon – Fri 9am – 5 pm  
or by appointment

Please contact: Brigitte Remmen  
bwremmen@bigpond.net.au  
or phone 9663 2495





Mohamed Abumeis, *Berber Dance* (2004)

# You Am I: An Exhibition of Contemporary Muslim Artists

A collaborative exhibition celebrating the diversity and uniqueness of the Australian Muslim identity through an exciting collection of works by local and interstate Contemporary Muslim Artists.

Presenting professional and up and coming works in photography, print, graphic design, contemporary canvas, landscapes, collograph, multi media, poetry, sculpture/mosaics and short film.

**February 15 - April 7 2010**  
Hume Global Learning Centre (HGLC)  
1093 Pascoe Vale Road, Broadmeadows VIC



"You Am I" is an initiative of the Islamic Council of Victoria in co-operation with the Hume City Council HGLC.

For more information go to [www.icv.org.au](http://www.icv.org.au) and [www.creativemuslims.com.au](http://www.creativemuslims.com.au)



## Alienation & the Scent of Memory



Revolutionary icon: identity continuity 'discipline' and melting' (2011)

An exhibition of painting by

**Mohamed Abumeis**

Monday 10 Sep - 15 Oct 2012

Opening: Friday 14 Sep. 5:30 - 7:30 pm

**@ DRUIDS CAFE**

407 - 409 Swanston St - Melbourne 3000 - Australia

Opening hours: Mon - Fri 9 am - 5pm

Please contact: Frank

96622350

or the artist: Mohamed Abumeis

[m\\_abumeis1@yahoo.com](mailto:m_abumeis1@yahoo.com)

Or phone 0431 288 740

## **Curriculum Vitae**

Mohamed Abumeis was born in Tripoli – Libya 1970, arrived to Australia 2009, and has lived and worked in Tripoli. He travelled, lived and studied in UK, the USA, and AUS. He has been exhibiting for about the past twenty years in (Libya, UK, Italy, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, German, Franc, USA, and Australia. As transnational artist, he has made the transition from national to international artist where some of his artworks have been collected in some over the world.

He is a member of teaching staff at the Faculty of Fine Arts – Tripoli University – Libya. He taught Fine Arts subjects specifically in the area of painting and drawing to the primary and advanced semesters, among which: Composition - Free hand drawing – Life drawing and Life painting (Portrait & Models) – Landscape – oil painting – Advanced oil painting –Materials technique – and supervision student projects.

### **Qualifications**

2009 Doctor of Fine Art **DFA** candidate, RMIT University Melbourne - Australia.

2004 Master of Arts **MA**, Manchester Metropolitan University, England

1994 **BA** (Painting) with honour, Tripoli University – Libya

### **Awards**

Master of Art - Scholarship (2000 -2004) UK

Doctoral of Fine Art - scholarship (2009 – 2013) AUS

### **Exhibitions**

I began exhibiting in 1990, sine he has been involved in many national exhibitions,

#### **Personal Exhibitions**

*'Alienation & the Scent of Memory'* at Druids Cafe, Swanston St, Melbourne (2012)

*'Narrative in Color & Texture'* at Art at St. Francis' Pastoral Centre, Melbourne (2012)

*'Place Embrace'* at Access Gallery Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, AUS - Melbourne (201

*'Passionate Darkness'* at The Art House gallery, Libya – Tripoli (2008)

*'In between 'over here' and 'over there'* at the prestigious gallery owned by the Ove Arup Company, UK - Manchester (2004)

*'Spectrum'* at The Blyth Gallery, UK - Manchester (2004)

*'Droops'* at The Art House Gallery, Libya – Tripoli (1999)

#### **Group Exhibitions**

- *You Am I: An Exhibition of Contemporary Muslim Artist* at the Hume Global Learning Center – Melbourne (2012 – 2011 - 2010)

- *On periphery*: a group of RMIT PhD, Doctorate and Masters of Fine Art students at Eckersley's Open Space Gallery - Melbourne (2011)
- *The CAS Collectors' Exhibition*: Contemporary Art Society of Victoria Inc, at Gallery 314 Richmond – Melbourne (2011)
- *Art at Burnley Harbour*: Contemporary Art Society of Victoria Inc – Melbourne (2011 – 2010)
- *Creative Cultures*: Exhibition of Spectrum Migrant Resource Center (MRC) at Australian on Collins – Melbourne (2010)
- *The First Libyan Cultural Day in Australia* – RMIT University, Melbourne (2010)
- *Works in progress* – School of Art Gallery, RMIT University, Melbourne – Australia (2009)
- North Africans Artists exhibition – Algeria (2009)
- Tunisian Artists Union exhibition – Tunisia (2008)
- Libyan Cultural week – Algeria (2007)
- Libyan Artists exhibition – Egypt (2007)
- Group Celphum exhibition – Libya (2007)
- German Cultural week, Libya – Tripoli (2007)
- French cultural Center organization exhibition *Mediterranean Shores* – Tripoli (2005)
- Biennale Napoli, Italy - Napoli (2005)
- Collective exhibition at the new office building in Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester City Center, UK – Manchester (2003)
- Collective exhibitions at Manchester Metropolitan University – UK (2002 - 2004)
- Collective exhibition at The Libyan Museum – Tripoli (1993)
- Collective and personal exhibitions at the faculty of Arts, Libya – Tripoli (1990 – 1994)

### **Supervision**

He supervised some Fine Arts student projects at the faculty of Arts, Libya – Tripoli.

### **Research interests**

- Color and texture
- Sense of a space place
- The dilemma of identity
- Transformation home through painting in contemporary context
- Enter cultural encounters and the emergence of new ideas
- Transforming belonging through art: belonging as framework
- Perspective of Transnationalism

**m\_abumeis1@yahoo.com**